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CAPTAIN CATCHEM'S EYES HAD A STARE OF WONDER. "YOU HAVEN'T GOT THE PAPERS?" HE CRIED.

OR,

Shadowing the Shadower.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL
FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "DODGER
DICK" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. AN OLD TRAIL.

OUR story opens in New Jersey, and at a lonely little railway station about forty miles from New York.

It is nine o'clock by the depot dial, and the man who has waited alone more than an hour for the Night Passenger walks to the edge of the platform and for the fiftieth time gazes down the dark track.

He is a well-to-do-looking person about fifty, with an ample iron-gray beard and a pair of keen, observing eyes. He looks for all the world like a Jerseyman who has no cause for complaint against anything save the train, which he knows is an hour late; but as he has improved the delay by conversing with the ticket-agent and operator, both positions being held by one man, he has passed the time quite agreeably.

Nobody would have taken the solitary passenger for what he really was—one of the sharpest of American detectives—Burt Butler, commonly called Captain Catchem, from the success that attended his work.

He never left New York except on business, and his appearance at the country depot signified that he had a case of some kind on hand.

The depot-agent was a young man who liked company, and when he knew that an accident would detain the train an hour, he hastened to communicate with the single passenger, and to cordle with him over his misfortune.

"You don't have much excitement here, I suppose," remarked the detective in an off-hand way during the talk.

"Not much. In fact, we haven't had a real sensation since the Murchison affair."

"What was that?"

The young agent looked surprised.

"To be sure I mustn't think that everybody has heard of it," he remarked with a smile, "but it got into all the papers at the time, and was pretty well spread. The old house stands over yonder on the hill. Six years have passed since that night, and it isn't the place it was when Mark Murchison occupied it."

"Was anybody killed?" asked Captain Catchem.

"No; it wasn't quite that bad. Mark Murchison was the richest man in this part of Jersey. Some said he didn't get all he had honestly, but that's neither here nor there now. He lived almost alone, being a widower at the time of the robbery. One night, shortly after twelve o'clock, he found two masked men in his room. They had entered the house by a rear window, and penetrated to his sleeping-chamber without disturbing him. He was covered by a pistol, bound and gagged. Having done this, the burglars proceeded to open the safe with tools which they had brought along, and when they went off, leaving Murchison in a semi-conscious condition, they took along two hundred thousand dollars in bonds, money and salable securities, besides certain papers which the owner called the most valuable part of his loss."

"A pretty big haul," commented the detective.

"I should say so. Murchison wasn't found until the next morning, when he was discovered by a man who lived on another part of the estate."

"What did he do toward bringing the robbers to justice?"

"He offered a good reward, and some detectives came down from New York. They cost him a good deal, I fancy, but accomplished nothing."

"Nothing at all?" asked the passenger. "It seems to me there should have been a clew of some kind."

"One would think so, but the swoop was the best-planned bit of business I ever heard of."

"If the men had lurked in the neighborhood they ought to have been seen," remarked Captain Catchem. "Boys are always roaming about—"

"There was a boy who said he saw the men, or two men who were believed to have been the burglars; but, Mark Murchison couldn't get him to open his mouth."

"Why not?"

"Because he was the Widow Jeffreys's son, and the family claimed that Murchison had grossly wronged it."

"How?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Jeffreys lived just beyond Murchison's land, on the west, occupying a little piece of ground for which she held a deed. Her household consisted of herself and a boy named Jed, at the time of the big robbery, about eleven. Jed Jeffreys was universally loved by the whole neighborhood. He was quick-witted, active, and a boy whom nothing could daunt. He sided with his mother in the quarrel with Mark Murchison."

"That was natural."

"Certainly. I know that the nabob on the hill repeatedly offered Mrs. Jeffreys a large sum for her little home, but she would spurn each offer with indignation, saying that if Murchison should turn over everything he had to her, it wouldn't any more than balance things. The Jeffreys seemed to be in Murchison's way."

"Well, as I was saying, Jed Jeffreys claimed to have seen the men who committed the robbery. He said he had seen them in broad daylight while they were hiding in the hollow, waiting for night, and before they put their masks on. You see evidence of this sort was just what Murchison and his detectives wanted; but they couldn't get it."

"The boy was too stubborn, eh?"

"That's just what he was."

"Do you think he knew anything?"

"To be sure he did! Everybody who knew Jed Jeffreys knew that he wouldn't tell a lie for the world. I have no doubt that he saw the robbers in the ravine, nor that he could have put the detectives on the right trail. But he said no, unless Murchison made thing even with his mother, and there the thing ended."

"Why didn't they arrest the boy and make him tell?"

"They talked of that, but in the midst of the excitement Jed disappeared, and, of course, the detectives and Murchison were balked."

"When the boy came back—"

"Bless you, he never came back!" interrupted the ticket agent.

"Never?"

"Never!" echoed the young man. "When he had been gone a year Mrs. Jeffreys sold her household goods, rented the cottage and vanished. Meantime Murchison had quitted the big mansion on the hill. They say he is in New York, living in clover, for he had a great sum in bank there when the mysterious robbery took place. It's a singular case all around, don't you think?"

The detective nodded.

"What became of the servant whom Murchison must have kept?"

"Polly Pindar?"

"Was that her name?"

"Yes. She slept in the dormitory and didn't hear the robbers at all, though Murchison said they made a deal of noise. She went away a short time before her master left."

Captain Catchem was silent for a few seconds.

"That boy would have been the thing for the detectives if they could have tapped him," he said at last.

"Of course!" smiled the agent. "Because of the old feud Mark Murchison hadn't money enough to get at his testimony. Jed is reported to have said once: 'Give up the papers you have and you shall hear all I know!'"

"What papers?"

"None of us know, but important ones, you may depend, if he said that."

"It is strange he never came back."

"That's what I think sometimes," was the reply.

"Nobody ever looks after the matter now, I presume?"

"Now and then a city bloodhound drops down among us and prowls round awhile, for Mark Murchison's reward of five thousand is said to be still standing; but the length of time that has intervened and the absence of Jed Jeffreys's testimony cut their efforts short, and they go away with their labor for their pains. None of them will hit the trail till the boy talks, and he'll be apt to keep his secret so long as the keeping of it is against Murchison's interests."

At this juncture the rumble of the delayed train was heard in the distance.

"She's five miles out yet," said the agent.

"It's queer that you never heard anything of our sensation."

"I may have heard of it at the time. In point of fact, your story calls it up vividly."

Captain Catchem did not say that the Murchison mystery was responsible for his presence there at that very time; that he had pumped other people as he had the unsuspecting agent; that he had inspected the scene of the famous robbery by a personal visit, and that he was then on his way back to his quarters in New York.

"Was Murchison very well liked by the people?" he asked, with his hand on his grip.

"He hadn't any close friends, because the people were inclined to believe that Mrs. Jeffreys had cause for hating him as she did. He was a handsome, silent, haughty man, as cool as a cucumber and as 'deep' as a well. We didn't hold a remonstrance meeting when we heard he was going to leave us; but, by Jupiter! we were sorry to hear of Jed's escapade."

"Where do you think the boy is?"

The agent shook his head.

"With his mother?"

"It's likely, but where is she?"

"Ay, there's the mystery," chuckled the detective.

Both men laughed together, and at that mo-

ment the flaming headlight of the big locomotive came round the bend, and the next minute drew alongside the depot.

"Good-night, sir," said the agent.

"Good-night, and thanks for the entertainment," responded Captain Catchem, climbing aboard, and waving the official a farewell as the train started.

Soon afterward he had selected a seat in the darkest corner of the coach, and with the brim of his hat pulled over his forehead, he leaned back and gave himself over to reflection.

"It wasn't such a wild-goose chase, after all," he murmured. "The lost link of the chain is Jed Jeffreys, the Jersey boy, and I must find him. Of course I'll report to the old man first, telling him what I think he ought to know, and then I'll try to run the Jersey secret-keeper down. I think I'm at the door of something deep and exciting, and that's what I like."

And the detective relapsed into silence, though his brain was still at work.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOST LINK.

ON reaching New York, Burt Butler repaired to an elegant residence in the upper part of the city, where he was met by a gentleman who appeared glad to see him.

This personage was Mark Murchison, already known, in part, to the reader, through the station-agent's story, and as the detective was in his employ, it was proper for him to go direct to the house from the ferry.

Mark Murchison was now nearly sixty. His hair and beard would have been nearly white but for his dyer; but nothing could change his austere look, nor soften the heart he carried in his bosom.

He greeted Captain Catchem with an eager smile, and then eyed the detective closely, as though he sought to read good or evil report, success or failure, by his countenance. But Catchem's face never betrayed him.

Though six years had elapsed since the robbery in Jersey, the New York detective had not been in Murchison's employ more than a month.

He had been surprised by an invitation to call after dark, and secretly, at the house to which we have followed him, and there, for the first time, he met face to face the man with whom he was destined to have much to do.

He was told the story of the robbers' visit; he learned how much money they had carried off, but Murchison, now very wealthy, said that he had enough without it. He wanted the robbers hunted down; he wanted to snatch from their grip certain papers which they were holding over his head, and with which they were bleeding him all the time.

In all this story there was not a word about the hatred which Mrs. Jeffreys and her boy Jed had manifested toward him.

Murchison said that a boy living near his house at the time of the robbery had professed a knowledge of the personal appearance of the knaves, having seen them, so he claimed, in hiding, but, when pressed, he had refused to furnish a mite of his evidence in the interests of justice.

The nabob spoke very bitterly of the boy. It was clear that he regarded him with a deep-seated hatred, and it was for the purpose of picking up some information about Jed Jeffreys that Captain Catchem had made a flying trip into Jersey.

"I hope you've picked up a link!" exclaimed Murchison, eying the detective like a hawk. "This constant bleeding and threatening is very annoying. I am willing to pay well for the stolen papers, but I will not give the rascals their price."

"Have they raised?" queried the detective, recalling the last demand, as he had been told by the man before him.

"They want two hundred thousand now."

"A raise of twenty-five thousand."

"Yes, the scamps."

Murchison opened a drawer in the table at which he sat and threw a letter before Captain Catchem.

"Read that," said he. "It is simply infamy in black and white."

Butler relieved the envelope of its contents, and opening the communication read as follows:

"We will not sell the documents in our possession for less than two hundred thousand dollars in cold cash, paid in full before a single paper is turned over. We know what we have, and so do you. Please communicate through the usual channel. The day of grace is slipping away, and if you will not save yourself you must put up with the consequences and blame no one but Mark Murchison."

"HOLDFAST & Co."

"That's a cool piece of business," remarked the rich man, falling back and looking at Captain Catchem.

"Pretty cool," smiled the detective. "What have you done in the matter?"

"Nothing. I had determined not to move until I had seen you. If we could ferret out those fellows—if we had obtained at the time of the robbery a personal description of them—"

"Such as the boy could have given, eh?"

Murchison seemed to lose color.

"Confound the boy!" he exclaimed.

"If he had remained in the neighborhood another day I would have been in possession of his secret. I had my plans laid, but when I came to carry them out the bird had flown. As I was saying, if we had then had a description of the robbers I might have beaten them years ago, and they wouldn't be holding this club over my head now."

"Might not the boy's mother have encouraged him in his action?" asked Captain Catchem.

Mark Murchison started in spite of himself.

"What have you discovered about the Widow Jeffreys? Do you know where she is?" he quickly inquired.

"Her whereabouts are unknown to me," was the reply. "The boy was the first to leave. The mother did not follow for some time."

Murchison seemed to take a long breath.

"Where have you been? On the ground?" he asked.

"Yes. I have just returned from Jersey," answered the detective.

"Haven't they been back since?"

"Nobody in the vicinity of Lamoyne knows anything concerning their whereabouts. They seem to have disappeared, as if the grave had swallowed both."

"Which I'm afraid isn't likely," smiled Murchison.

"But what's become of them?"

The man in the big velvet-armed chair again shook his head.

"The boy is the lost link of the chain," continued Captain Catchem. "Thus far Messrs. Holdfast & Co., have concealed their identity in a manner which does them credit, though they are the deepest and shrewdest rascals I have dealt with. You are expected to answer this last demand through 'the usual channel,' which means the newspaper. You don't want to send a positive answer, nor do you want to lead them to the belief that you will not pay the sum demanded."

"I'm to stand them off as it were, am I?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could do that till the Day of Judgment!" exclaimed Murchison.

"But, let us go back. You remember that I asked whether you thought the boy's mother influenced him?"

"Ah, so you did. Mrs. Jeffreys was a stubborn woman."

"Your enemy?"

"Not my friend, you may be sure. Did they tell you over in Jersey how I offered her ten times the value of her patch if she would vacate?"

"I heard that offer spoken of."

"Yes! She would not stir. When the robbery took place, and her boy came forward with the story of what he professed to have seen, yet would not divulge, I at once thought of his mother—that she was the power behind the throne; and I've thought so many times since."

"Was the boy truthful?"

"The people regarded him so," admitted Murchison, though with a reluctance which did not escape the observing detective.

"You don't think he would league with any one to do you an injury, do you?"

"If his mother had planned an injury he would have helped her to its accomplishment!" declared Murchison with spirit. "That woman hated me hard enough to do anything. Why she did so is neither here nor there, Captain Catchem. If you think of looking for the boy in hopes of getting at the identity of Holdfast & Co., I fear your time will be lost. The boy and his mother have not crossed my path since the robbery of Oak Mansion, though I am not satisfied that they are dead."

"Why not?"

A singular smile passed over Mark Murchison's face.

"Why not?" he echoed. "In one of the threatening letters with which I have been favored by Holdfast & Co., reference is made to the Jeffreyses in a way which tells me that the rascals believe they are still living."

"Have you no other proof?"

"Nothing positive. I thought I saw the boy about a month ago—saw him on a police

stretcher, after he had been taken from beneath the wreck of a wagon on the Bowery. I happened to be passing at the time and was stopped for a moment by the crowd. The victim of the runaway accident was carried past me in the glare of the street lamp and a thrill ran through me for I thought of the Jeffreys boy the moment I beheld the face on the cloth. It was mere fancy, no doubt, captain—I happened to be thinking of the robbery at the time—but, somehow or other, that face haunted me for more than a week. Now, let us come back to a reply to the letter you have just read."

Captain Catchem seemed willing to do this without further questioning concerning Jed, the lost link, and during the next few minutes the two agreed upon a reply to Holdfast & Co., which was to be inserted in one of the leading morning papers.

Armed with the reply which he was to carry to the counting-room on his way down-town, Captain Catchem bade Murchison good-night and quitted the house with a puzzled smile.

"The boy becomes more valuable as time flies," he said to himself. "I must find Jed Jeffreys and see what he is like. Murchison unconsciously gave me something to work on. He never said anything about the Bowery accident before to-night. This case is deeper than I thought. It is dark, too. If I'm not mistaken, a foul wrong has been done, and my employer is not the only sufferer."

Half an hour later Captain Catchem walked into a police station near the Bowery, and was recognized by the officer in charge with a cheery nod.

The hunt for Jed Jeffreys had begun.

CHAPTER III.

HOLDFAST & CO.

ABOUT the time of the detective's visit to the station-house, one of two men unlocked the front door of a frame dwelling a few squares from the place, and the couple went forward and disappeared.

A few seconds afterward they were in a small back room very plainly furnished and with curtains down.

The eldest of the couple might have reached his fortieth year; his companion looked fifteen years younger. The latter was very good-looking and stylishly dressed. He wore his black mustache waxed to points, and gloves of the softest kid incased his hands.

This person was known as Webb Weldon, while his companion, not so handsome nor as well-dressed, answered to the name of Nicholas Nottingham.

When they had flooded the little room with light from the overhead gas-burner, the younger threw himself into an arm-chair that threatened to break under him, and broke forth in petulant tones:

"I'm getting tired of this!" cried he. "If we don't raise the wind pretty soon I'm knocked out."

Nottingham looked at him with a dark frown.

"Give him time," he urged.

"Time? By heavens, he's had plenty of time, to my notion."

"We will find his answer in to-morrow's paper."

"And what will it be when we've found it?" demanded Weldon. "What has it been all along? He has put us off from time to time till I'm sick of his foolishness. We've got the grip on him, and if we let up we deserve to be thrown into the bay with millstones at our necks."

"I'm pretty sure the last letter will fetch him."

The young man laughed derisively.

"I hope you're correct, Nick. I can't win in my little up-town game without having something to back up my assertions. I have made out that I will be able to place my hands on a cool hundred thousand on my wedding day and that event isn't far off if things don't get tripped up by this cat and mouse play with old Murchison. If I were compelled to produce the hundred thousand to-morrow, what could I do? You know. I'd lose the young lady and the fortune which the old gentleman will leave her, ere long. So you see the fix I'm in. This business must be closed. This reply to the first letter sent by Holdfast & Co., must be entirely satisfactory, or, by Jupiter! I'll make a desperate move that will astonish all parties concerned."

Nottingham looked at his companion somewhat amazed.

"I mean every word of it!" continued Weldon, striking his chair arm with emphasis. "If he

plays with us a little longer I lose my brilliant prospects, and all our work falls to the ground."

He took a cigar from his pocket, bit the end off in a savage manner and began to smoke.

"You know he has put a detective on the trail?" remarked Nottingham who was coolly watching him.

"Captain Catchem? Yes, I know that. But I don't fear him, we've covered our tracks in a manner that does us credit. Why, Mark Murchison doesn't know us from the man in the moon. I passed the old fellow yesterday and even dropped a word with him in the Park the other day, and he hadn't the slightest idea that I belong to the famous house of Holdfast & Co. That detective catch us on information he expects to pick up? Nonsense! I'd sooner run from the boy, than from Burt Butler."

Nottingham, who had followed Weldon's example by taking a cigar from his pocket, burst into a laugh.

"What do you think Murchison would give to be closeted with the Jersey boy an hour?" he asked.

"A good deal, no doubt, especially if the youngster was more communicative than when Oak Mansion was 'pulled,' six years ago. But, the boy has vanished completely. He said boldly that he wouldn't tell Murchison what he knew unless the old man made amends for the past, but that he couldn't do because— But you know why, Nick, so I needn't particularize."

Nottingham nodded knowingly.

"Captain Catchem might undertake to find the Jersey boy," he suggested.

"Where would he look?" exclaimed Weldon.

"Both the boy and his mother have disappeared. Yes, where would the detective look?"

"Of course I don't know, but this man Catchem is shrewd."

"Granted; but six years have elapsed. The circumstances were forgotten long ago except by the several parties. Why, the Jersey people don't mention the affair any more. When I was up there last summer they would not talk about the old incident, and never asked what had become of Murchison. Therefore, with matters in this state, I'd like to know where Captain Catchem would begin to look for the Jeffreys boy, supposing that he entertains such an idea. Let him go ahead. What we want to do is to close in on the two hundred thousand, for Holdfast & Co. must let nothing put them off till their heads are gray."

"Speaking of the vanishment of the widow and her son, it always struck me as being a queer piece of business. The boy went first, and the mother did not follow until he had found a place for both."

"You assume that," smiled Weldon between puffs.

"Yes, but with good reasons," continued Nottingham. "The boy was shrewd, determined and deeply attached to his mother. He had a home for her when she went away, and what more likely than that that home is in some city where Jed, as they called him, could find employment for his wits?"

For a moment the face of the young smoker assumed a look of alarm.

"Do you think—" he began and stopped.

"Do I think the couple have made Gotham their home all these years, eh?" queried Nottingham. "Nothing surprises me nowadays. The boy was about eleven then; he would be seventeen now. In those six years he has lost none of his shrewdness and with the incentive which would naturally animate him, he might prove dangerous, if he has found the trail."

"The more reason for closing up the job!" cried Weldon.

"If the boy is here in the city at work on his own hook, yes," was the response.

Webb Weldon frowned and threw his cigar away.

"I say we must finish the whole thing up, this time," he exclaimed, pacing the room, and glancing now and then at his companion. "This piecemeal blackmail is too slow and risky. I have too much at stake to let it go on. If Mark Murchison returns an evasive or obscure reply to our last letter, I'm for tightening the clamps till he cries for mercy. Does he think we hold nothing compromising? Is the man so foolish as to believe that we don't know the whereabouts of the damaging papers? By heavens, we will show him that he is the most mistaken man in New York!"

Weldon had walked to one of the windows of the room. He took hold of the curtain and pulled it aside, then placed his face close to the pane as if anxious to get a glimpse of the night outside.

Nottingham, who was still eying him closely, saw him start and drop the curtain.

"We've been watched!" cried Weldon, exhibiting a face so pale as to be almost devoid of color.

The other sprung up and went forward.

"Watched?" he echoed.

"Yes. A spy jumped from the sloping roof when I looked out. Don't contradict me with a look of incredulity; I know what I saw, and my eyes aren't in my head for nothing."

"What was he like?" asked Nottingham.

"Like a man, of course," grinned Weldon.

"He may be lurking in the yard."

Nottingham at once led the way from the room and the cramped back-yard which began at the base of the low back building attached to the house and ran to the alley.

A rain had fallen within the last few hours and the ground, almost entirely devoid of grass, was wet and spongy. It did not take the two men long to discover that the fenced-in yard at that time held nobody but themselves.

"Look here!" suddenly exclaimed Weldon, pointing toward the ground. "Say I saw nobody will you?"

A ray of light falling from one of the upper windows of the adjoining premises showed them a foot-track very distinct in the earth.

Both men stooped and examined it with breathless curiosity. Robinson Crusoe on his island did not study the strange footprint in the sand with less excitement.

"What if he not only saw, but overheard us?" asked Weldon, looking into Nottingham's face.

"What if this unknown spy actually overheard the private consultation of Holdfast & Co.?"

Nottingham said nothing for a moment.

"I wish we could have caught him on the roof," he said at last.

"It would have cost him his life!"

"That it would. I don't like this business."

"I thought not!" laughed Weldon.

"I did not think Captain Catchem equal to this emergency."

"What? Do you think he was the person on the roof? A while ago we were laughing at the detective's failure to find out any thing for Mark Murchison; now—"

"If the spy wasn't Captain Catchem, who was he?" interrupted Nottingham.

Weldon shook his head perplexedly.

Having tracked the spy to the fence which he had scaled, the two returned to the house, and when they had entered the little room Weldon turned upon Nottingham and seized his arm.

"Look here!" he cried. "It seems to me that Holdfast & Co. will be in a tight box if something isn't done within the next twenty-four hours. That spy wasn't the detective. He didn't look big enough for Captain Catchem. Who else would track us?"

"There's another interested party, Webb," returned Nottingham. "There is another person who wants what we hold in our net; but who, if he is of the same mind he was six years ago, don't want old Murchison to come out best. I say there's a person of this sort, if death hasn't claimed him since the affair."

"I understand you, Nick. You don't speak in riddles when you use language like that."

"I thought not."

"You mean the Jersey boy—Jed Jeffreys."

Nottingham's answer was a nod.

"But we can't look for him in a city like this. We can't stop with the last cards in our hand and hunt him down. We must have the play out with Mark Murchison. I'm anxious to see the morning paper. It will settle matters one way or the other. Murchison is in a trap of which Holdfast & Co. are the jaws. And no Jersey boy—I don't care what his motives are—shall loosen those jaws, or break their force!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROFILE PROOF.

LET us follow the spy who so suddenly broke the secret deliberations of Holdfast & Co. and see who he was and what became of him.

When he had scaled the fence at the end of the yard, dropping into the alley with the agility of a cat, he made off rapidly and came into view on the street some distance away.

Now he was seen to be a well-formed, good-looking youth of seventeen, agile and quick, and not long after reaching the street he ran up the steps that rose above the floor of a certain hallway, and bursting into a room on the second floor, surprised a plain-faced woman of fifty.

"You come in like a storm, my boy," said the woman with a smile.

"I don't know but that I have some one at my heels, mother."

"I trust not, Jed."

"I've just come from the two scamps in council," replied the boy who, without further concealment, was Jed Jeffreys, Captain Catchem's "lost link."

"Did they see you?" asked the mother anxiously.

"Webb Weldon did, but not in time to get his fingers upon me. I was too quick for him, for by the time he and his pard reached the yard, I was over the fence and gone. I played it pretty fine on the pair. When they came home I was at my old place on the roof, and if Webb hadn't accidentally come to the window, I would have heard the whole thing out."

"What! could you hear them too?"

"That I could, mother. The shutter was closed, 'tis true, but one of the panes had a corner broken out, and not a word escaped me up to, the moment of the young chap's appearance at the window."

Having reached this point, Jed proceeded to tell his mother what he had seen and heard from his place on the sloping roof of the shed.

"So," said she at the close of the narrative, "so Mark Murchison has a detective at work?"

"He has; Captain Catchem, everybody knows him."

"Do you?"

"Both by reputation and when I see him."

"You must steer clear of him."

"I know that, mother. One of the last men I want to meet now is this ferret who is working up Mark Murchison's case for him. If the detective finds Holdfast & Co., he'll make 'em disgorge to Murchison; then, where are we to get anything? No, I will play detective on my own hook. The scamps must disgorge to us, mother, for, if Murchison recovers what he lost six years ago, we fail; that's all."

"And the infamous wrong that has blighted my life will never be righted!" exclaimed Mrs. Jeffreys with spirit. "Captain Catchem is like most of his class. They work for reward, Jed, and in this case we can't outbid the man who lives in the fine house and has the cash. Steer clear of this detective."

"As I would from a rattlesnake."

"He may look for you because of the stand you took six years ago in Jersey."

"I don't think he can find me. I'm no little boy any longer," and Jed straightened with pride and looked at his mother. "Six years make a vast difference in one who grows fast. I don't look like the boy who looked down into the ravine that afternoon and saw the rascals making their masks while they let me know that they were up to something dark."

"I remember exactly how you looked then," observed the widow with a smile.

"Now, mother, we've got to close in on Holdfast & Co.," said Jed after a brief pause. "If this last threat of theirs fails, they will strike a blow for Murchison's money, and if they don't get what they want they'll take less."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. Webb Weldon must make a showing of wealth before long, or lose the young lady he is about to win."

"The mean plotter!" cried Mrs. Jeffreys. "I pity the creature who is drawn into his snare."

"So do I, and I'll go out of my way to put a stone in his path. He is so anxious to win the girl that he will induce Nottingham to lower the price asked; but you must not believe that Murchison, our evil genius, will ever get the stolen documents for nothing. If he gets them again you know what will become of them?"

"They'll go straight from his hands to the fire," answered the widow.

"A place to which he wishes he had consigned them years ago," added Jed. "Let the missing documents go back to Mark Murchison and he will be ready to snap his fingers at us."

"And he can snap them with impunity, too."

"My blood seems to boil whenever I see him. He rolls in wealth, lives like a lord in a big house all by himself, and on whose money! Ah, mother, it seems to me that Justice sometimes misses the target altogether. Think of it, Mark Murchison may have given Captain Catchem, his detective, pointed instructions to ferret us out. Why? To make me give him a clew to the men who committed the robbery six years ago—to point out to him the present whereabouts of Holdfast & Co. in order that he may help the man who would crush us under his heel if he could get us there. No, not a clew for Captain Catchem; not while the blood of the Jeffreys flows through my veins, and that will be while life lasts! I'll fight our battle, mother. Our cause is in my hands, and I'll know no rest until the victory has been won!"

"Brave boy! You are the only living person

I can trust!" exclaimed the widow, with moistened eyes. "You have to look out for a new hunter from now on. The detective will probably search for you. If Holdfast & Co. are keeping their personality in the dark while they play their hand against Mark Murchison, I don't see how Captain Catchem can pick up a clew without you. We will look at the papers tomorrow and see what reply is made to the last demand."

A few minutes later Jed left the house, and, with his keen eyes on the alert, made off down the street.

Thus far he had carefully avoided the men who had plundered Mark Murchison of some things of more value than money.

To be sure they had been lost for years to him, but his tireless industry had unearthed them, and he had been their constant shadow for some time.

We know that Webb Weldon and Nicholas Nottingham, the two conspirators, had an idea that the Jersey boy was somewhere in the city, and the discovery of the spy on the roof strengthened this belief.

On the other hand, Mark Murchison had seen nothing of the missing witness, and during the six years that had elapsed since the robbery, had run across but one face that recalled him, and that was the face of the boy who was hurt in the accident on the Bowery.

Jed, after quitting the house which had been their home for years, went direct to a residence as plain as his own but a good many squares distant.

The door was opened by a boy who was dwarfed in stature—a boy with an oldish face which had wrinkles. He was slightly hunchbacked besides, which added to his uncomeliness; but he had the brightest eyes ever seen in a boy's head.

He greeted Jed with a grin of delight and patted him familiarly on the shoulder when he had let him in.

"You've found something out. I know it!" cried the hunchback. "Your eyes never deceive me, Jed. Let's go back to the old room and I'll listen."

The boy led Jed into a small chamber in the back part of the house and pushed a stool toward him.

The deformed had a singular occupation. He would wander into the parks after the lighting of the lamps and cut from bits of paper which he carried fac-similes of the faces he met with. His fingers were deftness itself and his work marvelous.

In this manner he made enough to let him live comfortably in the house where Jed visited him, and as "Scissors Simon," as he was called, had taken a fancy to the Jersey boy, the liking had grown to be mutual.

"Before you tell me any thing," said Scissors to Jed who had no secrets which he withheld in that room, "let me show you my last work. I was out last night. Business wasn't very good. I was alone on my old bench waiting for a 'poser' when two of them strolled into the circle made by the electric light. There was something about them that struck me forcibly, and what you have told me rushed through my mind. They formed such a rare picture that I couldn't keep my scissors in my pocket, but I had to work in secret. I slipped from my settee and took to the protecting shadows of the bushes near by, and from there I got a good picture of the gentlemen. Here they are."

Simon opened a stand drawer and took forth the profiles of two faces which he handed to Jed.

"Ho!" cried the Jersey boy sharp. "You caught them on the wing, didn't you?"

The little hunchback laughed.

"Do you think so?" he queried.

"To be sure I do! Your work speaks for itself, Simon. This face belongs to Nicholas Nottingham and the other to Webb Weldon. You have captured the sharp twins together, nabbed Holdfast & Co., in an admirable manner. Your scissors have no equal. They're as good as a detective camera. This picture would 'go' in court."

Simon's eyes snapped with delight over this praise which he knew was genuine.

"I thought you'd know them," he exclaimed.

"They didn't see you at work, eh?"

"Of course not. I was too shrewd for that. They remained long enough to let me finish the job, and then walked away. Keep the profiles, Jed. I thought of you while I worked."

Jed, with thanks, placed the paper in an inner pocket, and during the next ten minutes Simon listened to his adventure on the roof.

He gave Jed the same advice his mother had proffered. It was, "Look out for Holdfast & Co.,

and steer clear of Captain Catchem, the detective."

"I'll do both, Simon," answered the Jersey boy, and when he left the house some time afterward, he clapped his hand on his bosom to assure himself that the important work of Simon's scissors was still there.

Alas! for Jed! The unwished-for was about to happen.

CHAPTER V. CAPTURED.

It was with unconcealed eagerness that the Jersey boy purchased bright and early the next morning a copy of a certain paper. He did not proceed directly home in order that his mother might share with him the discovery he expected to make, but opened the journal at once and sought the "personal" column.

A moment later his eyes rested on a "personal" which sent a thrill along his nerves, and in a friendly doorway he read half aloud as follows:

"H. & Co.:—Do not think that matter off. Letter at hand and will be speedily attended to. M."

"It's very brief, but tells its own story," said Jed to himself. "'H. & Co.' means Weldon and Nottingham, and 'M.' is Murchison. It's as plain to me as though the full names of the parties appeared in the 'personal.' It won't suit Webb Weldon; I know it. He will see that the last line means a delay—that Mark Murchison is playing for more time. He wants to circumvent the pair with his detective, and time is precious now. No, that won't suit Mr. Weldon. He wants money; he must make a showing of wealth, or lose the young lady on the avenue."

Jed put the paper away and went home. He read the "personal" aloud to his mother and commented thereon in the same strain just noticed.

"Now, what are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Jeffreys.

"I shall bring matters to a crisis," answered Jed. "Webb Weldon will be for moving straight on Murchison's works. I don't think Nick Nottingham will be able to hold him back."

At this juncture and before the widow could reply there came, sharp and resonant, a knock on the door.

Both mother and son started, but the widow recovered first and opened the portal.

There stood before them a man whose face was covered with a thick gray beard.

Jed could hardly keep back a rising cry of recognition, for, despite some clever masking, the visitor stood before him as Captain Catchem!

Mrs. Jeffreys, of course, did not know the man, but a terrible suspicion rose instantly in her mind.

The detective had already spied Jed, who was looking at him from his chair, and as the widow held the door open he came in with a pleasant "Good-morning."

The boy was caught at last. The very man whom he had resolved to avoid had found him almost before his resolution had ceased to sound.

Jed knew, or thought, at least, that the best way to meet the difficulty was to put on a bold front and from the start let Captain Catchem know that if he was in Mark Murchison's pay, he had come to the wrong house for information.

"Mother," said Jed, waving his hand toward the detective, "this is Burt Butler, commonly called Captain Catchem."

The famous detective was completely taken aback by this unexpected move. It had been executed without the slightest warning and the effect was like the dropping of a thunderbolt.

"I know what the gentleman wants," continued Jed. "Take a chair, captain. I can't say that I'm overjoyed to see you; but I'll make your visit as pleasant as I can."

Captain Catchem in finding Jed so soon had been highly favored by fortune.

The incident concerning the accident on the Bowery, as detailed by Murchison, had given him his clew. At the station-house where he saw him last he had learned the name of the injured boy; not only this but he had seen one of the policemen who carried Jed home, and from him had secured all the necessary information.

The detective knew the moment he saw Jed at home that he had not made a mistake. He had discovered the lost link—the boy who saw by daylight the men who robbed Murchison in Jersey.

"Now, captain, what is it?" asked Jed, coming to the ferret's relief, for his manner of opening the interview had embarrassed him in spite of

his coolness. "We need no introduction. I'm Jed Jeffreys, formerly of New Jersey, and the unwilling witness of six years ago. In other words, I'm the boy you're looking for."

It cost Jed an effort to give vent to such language. It was "taking the bull by the horns," as he afterward told Scissors Simon, but he saw no other way out of the dilemma.

Captain Catchem could not keep back a smile at Jed's boldness.

"You are right, Master Jeffreys," said he. "Just now I am looking for a young man of your description and—"

"In the interest of Mark Murchison?" exclaimed Jed's mother, springing forward and laying her hand heavily upon the detective's shoulder.

"Don't get excited, mother," put in Jed.

"I can't help it. My blood boils when I think of that man. If you have become his agent, Captain Catchem, my son shall give you no information, no matter how much you lose individually by his silence."

"Wait, madam," answered the ferret calmly. "I have the feelings of a man if I do sometimes hunt down my fellow-creatures. Your son and I will come to an understanding."

Mrs. Jeffreys, with a look at Jed, drew off reluctantly.

"He will tell you nothing that conflicts with our interests," said she. "After all these years of injustice he will not, he must not, favor the man in whose employ you are said to be."

Captain Catchem bowed and turned to Jed.

"You lived in Jersey six years ago?" he queried.

"Yes, but why approach the subject by degrees?" smiled the boy. "Hit the nail on the head the first blow, captain. We lived there at the time of the robbery of Oak Mansion, the home of Mark Murchison. I am the witness who ran off to keep from telling him what I knew. I saw the robbers in the ravine. I got a good look at them for I watched them more than two hours. They say the reason the detectives never caught them was my refusal to describe them at the time."

"You are right," replied the detective. "If you had told the story of your watch in detail the mystery would have been cleared up long ago."

"Just so," laughed Jed. "And we would have received no more justice than he had doled out to us before."

"You don't like the gentleman known as Murchison?"

"Why should we?" cried the widow. "If you knew the past as we know it—if you could be told the story of wrong as it might be detailed, you would not wonder that we have nothing but hate—heaven forgive us!—for that base man. Perhaps you should not be blamed. You are a detective; you work for money. Mark Murchison no doubt pays you well for what you are doing; he can afford to. You and Jed for it. I have confidence in my boy," and Mrs. Jeffreys quitted the room, leaving Captain Catchem and Jed alone.

"It deeply affects my mother," remarked Jed; "but let us not talk of that. You have run me down. I think I know what you want."

"You ought to know."

"You want my description of the men I saw that day."

"I do."

"You will then want to know whether I know their present whereabouts."

The detective nodded.

"Captain Catchem, I will give you the description which I refused Mark Murchison and his detectives six years ago, but there my information must stop."

The boy spoke with a firmness which must have told the detective that nothing would move him.

"You don't realize the needs of your full speech concerning this affair," said the shadow.

"Those men are villains who ought to be behind bars, and each moment of their liberty is a menace to the public."

"I know that. I know that just now they are playing a dark game for a fortune. They have Mark Murchison in the toils, and are putting the thumb-screws to him in grand shape."

"Then, of course, you know their identity, their disguises, their hiding-place. You have not lost sight of these men for six years."

Jed made no reply.

"You have stopped the wheels of justice; you are willing to see the rascals perpetrate another crime, one as great as the first effort. Because you and your mother fancy you have been wronged—"

"Fancy, do you say?" broke in Jed, his eyes

lighting up with indignation as he spoke. "It is not fancy, but terrible fact! The moment of Mark Murchison's triumph puts off the day of retribution forever. When you carry to him the spoils of that old robbery you deprive us of vindication. Fancy, do you say, Captain Catchem? Would to heaven it were such!"

"I'm sorry to find you in this humor," answered the detective. "I have no desire to further an injustice."

"I want to believe that." "I am in Murchison's employ. Seeing that you have known this for some time, I will not attempt to conceal the fact. You will not disclose the whereabouts of—"

Captain Catchem paused a second.

"Of Holdfast & Co., eh?" finished Jed with a smile.

"Yes! You know the men; you are familiar with their movements."

"I know the men!" responded Jed firmly. "A description of them as they appeared six years ago would be of no practical benefit now. They have changed. Six years make a good deal of difference in face and figure. I'm sorry, Captain Catchem. We'll have to fight our own battles. Your triumph in this matter means our defeat. You must hunt Holdfast & Co., without my assistance. I know what victory for Mark Murchison means. Tell him, if you will, that you have found us. Say to him that until he rights the wrong—the infamous wrong—my mouth, as a witness, will be closed. Meantime, I shall go on and carry out the plans I have formed. I am my own shadow. I have been a detective on my own book for three years, and if Mark Murchison and Holdfast & Co. foil me, I will submit as gracefully as I can. But I keep my own secrets, captain."

Finding himself balked, the New York detective, half an hour later, quitted the home of the Jeffreyses with thoughts he had not had before, but determined still to find Holdfast & Co., and speedily reach the end of the trail.

CHAPTER VI.

JED IN THE TOILS.

THE Boy Shadow now resolved to "push things" as fast as possible.

Finding himself discovered by Captain Catchem who seemed to have entered heart and soul into Mark Murchison's service, he knew he would have to act promptly in order to get ahead of the detective.

Saying nothing to his mother concerning his intentions, he soon followed Burt Butler into the street, but did not attempt to play shadow until the following night.

Knowing from certain observations cautiously taken, that Holdfast & Co. were seldom at home at that hour, he went straight to their retreat, resolved upon entering the house which he had long desired to search.

Jed was anxious to find the documents which Weldon and Nottingham were holding over Murchison's head, while they demanded the enormous sum of two hundred thousand for the same.

Jed reached the house and found it silent and apparently deserted.

Making his way into the back-yard he effected an entrance through the basement window and stood in darkness that seemed visible.

The adventuresome Jersey boy now drew his shoes, and finding the stair-door unlocked slipped up the steps and searched the second floor.

He felt that he was the sole tenant of the house at that hour, and if he could but find the hiding-place of the missing papers, he would place in his own hands a weapon which Mark Murchison would not affect to despise.

The sleeping-room of the two conspirators he found empty, which discovery confirmed his belief that the men were not at home.

With the coast thus clear Jed went to work, but with all his search he found nothing.

He was careful to replace every thing he disturbed lest Holdfast & Co., coming home should discover that the house had been visited and suddenly and secretly change their quarters.

Jed found a lamp which he placed on the floor so as to keep its light from reaching the window, and this assisted him greatly in the search.

He had finished the hunt and stood at the head of the staircase about to descend to the basement when he was startled by the click of a key in the front lock.

The sound caused the Boy Shadow's heart to stand still.

The next moment the door opened, he heard voices and saw two figures enter the hall.

Holdfast & Co. had come home!

JNA

Jed heard the door locked, for the night evidently, and lost sight of the men as they had entered a room on the left of the hall.

"I may gather some information before I quit this trap," thought the boy. "If they don't suspect my presence here I may not be disturbed at all. If I am discovered there will be a scene not down on the bills."

By this time a light had been struck in the room below, and Jed, leaning over the banisters heard the men who had come.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Webb Weldon. "The 'personal' means time. He wants to put us off while his detective hunts for a clew. Captain Catchem is yet at fault, though men of his kind are liable to strike a lead at any time. I won't be held back any longer, I can't afford it. I lose a rich wife if I do. If I can't make a showing of wealth within twenty-four hours I am out."

The younger member of the firm spoke hotly.

"I own that his reply does not come up to my expectations," said the voice of Nottingham.

"I should say not. I shall tighten the screws. Mark Murchison shall deal with us within the time I have mentioned or the game is up for him. Here! I hold in my hand the club that brains him."

Eager to see down into the room through the transom above the door Jed leaned heavily on the banisters which suddenly rewarded his eagerness with a cracking noise.

The heart of the boy detective stood still again. If the conspirators should discover him he was lost; there was no doubt of that.

"What was that?" asked Webb Weldon.

"Nothing."

"I won't say that, because it sounded like the breaking of the banister in the hall."

"Pish! who's there to break it?" and Nottingham laughed at his companion's fears.

During this time Jed did not move. He stood amid pitchy darkness wondering what would be the next move and how it would affect him.

Presently the room door opened and in the light that poured into the hall the boy saw the face of Webb Weldon.

The conspirator looked up, trying to follow the steps to the top, and making out the banister as best he could. But fortunately for Jed the shadows where he stood had not been touched by the light and he felt comparatively safe.

"Come back. There's nothing in the house, fool!" exclaimed Nottingham. "This isn't playing the last hand against the gold-bug up-town."

To Jed's relief Weldon drew back into the room and closed the door.

"I'm not so sure that no one is in the house but ourselves," the boy heard him say. "If we are found out now the jig is up, and all my little up-town scheme will amount to nothing."

"Does Lola demand that you shall show so much wealth?"

"No, but her father does. I've spoiled the deal between the girl and a young fellow of whom she really seems to think a good deal; but her father rather likes me, and my story that by a certain death I will be worth one hundred thousand has quite caught the old fish. That's the fix I'm in. Once a member of the Lewis family and I am feathered for life. And so are you, Nick, no matter how soon Murchison's thousands slip through our fingers."

This speech contained a piece of news for the boy on the staircase. He now knew the name of the family which Webb Weldon expected to enter by means of a display of wealth which he had forced from Mark Murchison.

"You rascals don't deserve to succeed in anything!" mentally exclaimed Jed. "I never saw such a precious pair of villains."

"Go up-stairs and get the box," said the voice of Nottingham. "We'll look over the papers and write the last letter."

The door opened again, and Jed saw a figure at the foot of the staircase before he could stir.

Webb Weldon, young, active and as strong as a lion, was coming up!

Seemingly, there was no escape.

Jed, however, drew back and pressed himself against the wall above. It was all he could do, for should he seek refuge in the room on his right he would be found, for Weldon would doubtless look for the box with a light.

With his heart in his throat the Jersey boy waited for the junior member of Holdfast & Co.

Webb Weldon came on, and at the head of the flight struck a match, whose light, flashing up in an instant, revealed the statue-like figure against the wall!

The young man fell back as though he had been confronted by a ghost. If he had recoiled a little further he would have fallen headlong

down-stairs, and, in all probability, have broken his neck.

"I thought I was right awhile ago!" he cried, when he found his tongue, and leaning forward he thrust his lucifer into Jed's face and stared at the boy detective.

"This is better than finding a gold-mine!" he went on, suddenly dashing the match to the floor and seizing Jed before he could move. "Come down-stairs, boy, I want to show you to somebody there."

Of course in the iron-like grip of Webb Weldon the Jersey boy could not move. He was held as though in a vise, and in this condition was escorted down-stairs and into the room where Mr. Nottingham had lit a cigar.

"Here's something new!" exclaimed Weldon, leading Jed forward, while Nottingham uncrossed his legs, which he had lifted upon the table, and stared at the boy with an involuntary oath of surprise.

"Where did you catch that fish?" he asked.

"At the head of the stairs."

"Alone?"

"Yes, and obligingly waiting for me. Don't you recognize him?"

"Stand him out there in the light. So."

Jed stood the man's scrutiny with unruffled composure though the leer of triumph in the dark eyes maddened him.

"Who is he?" asked Nottingham, looking at Weldon.

"The boy we've talked about—the fellow who wouldn't tell what he pretended he knew because an old chap he didn't like wanted the information. In other words, this is the Jeffreys rat."

"Obol!" laughed Nottingham. "I see plainly now. What were you after up-stairs, boy?"

Jed drew back and straightened in the light.

"I guess a fellow has a right to look after his own affairs!" he said.

"To be sure," drawled Nottingham, twisting the ends of his mustache. "But you mustn't look after those affairs to the detriment of ours."

"That's it exactly," chimed in Weldon.

"Take a chair, boy."

As Jed manifested no eagerness to obey this command, the young conspirator sprang fiercely forward and forced him into a chair near the table.

"This is serious!" cried Weldon as he executed the work. "You've been playing spy. You are against us, and there's no telling what sort of compact exists between you and the man you hated so years ago."

"If you mean Mark Murchison know that I haven't changed my opinion of him!" was the quick retort, accompanied by a look which emphasized the boy's declaration. "The great wrong is still unrighted, and, what is more, if you men had a grain of mercy or sympathy in your hearts you would help to right it."

The two men exchanged glances and laughed.

"We're looking after matters that concern our welfare," returned Webb Weldon.

"I know you are," answered Jed, alluding to the young man's wife-hunting. "You are playing two games at once, but you can't win both."

"Why can't I?"

"Because justice won't let you."

"Hear him!" laughed Weldon turning to his companion. "He talks as though he expects to balk us. Where's your mother, boy?"

"Where you will never find her if you wait until I betray her to you!"

"Insolent, eh?"

"Come, that won't do!" cried Nottingham catching Weldon's sleeve as he started toward Jed with clinched hands and flushed face.

"We've got to silence him. We can't let him go. This is the Jersey boy and he knows too much already."

"Nobody proposed to release him," answered Nottingham. "I know just how dangerous he is to our interests. Captain Catchem has secured his services—"

"Never!" interrupted Jed. "I am in no man's pay, I obey orders from no one."

"Then, in the name of heaven, what is your mission?"

"It is this: I seek to vindicate the honor of our family. I want the papers which can do that, and those papers were taken from Mark Murchison six years ago and are now in your hands. Don't look at me as though they were not. I know they are!"

CHAPTER VII.

UNLOOKED-FOR LUCK.

THE bravery of Jed, the boy detective, amazed the two crooks. They did not expect him to exhibit such an amount of courage under

the circumstances, cooped up as he was and completely in their power.

After their astonishment had subsided in a degree they laughed in Jed's face, but this did not daunt him.

"I'd like to know how you're going to get at those documents," exclaimed Nottingham. "Knowing where they are is one thing, getting them is quite another."

Jed realized the force of these words.

He knew that Holdfast & Co. would never deliver up the papers he desired, that they were the club held over Mark Murchison's head, and that soft words would not advance his cause with two villains.

"What'll you give for them?" suddenly asked Webb Weldon.

His voice had a derisive sneer.

Jed made no reply.

"They're in the market," continued the young sport. "Open your heart, boy, and make us an offer."

"You know I can't buy them," was the answer. "You know that I haven't anything like the sum you want. I am not Mark Murchison."

"And you thank heaven you are not, eh?"

"I do!" cried Jed promptly. "I wouldn't be that man for all the wealth he possesses!"

"We needn't prolong this interview," said Nottingham, coolly crossing his legs again.

"What will you do if we let you go?"

"I'll continue to fight for my rights."

"Plucky!" laughed Nick, glancing at his companion. "You came to this house to look for the documents you speak of?"

"Frankly, I did."

"But you did not find them?"

"I did not."

"Do you think they're here?"

"Where the vultures are the spoil is generally found."

"By Jupiter, good!" burst forth Nottingham, striking the table in his glee.

Webb Weldon frowned.

"We don't seek a quarrel with a boy," Nick went on. "Turn him loose, Webb."

"Turn him loose?" echoed Weldon falling back. "In the name of common sense, are you mad?"

"Not exactly, I hope. I know what I'm about. The boy knows that the moment he moves against us the documents will pass forever beyond recovery. That moment will settle the whole matter. Mr. Jeffreys is no fool. Turn him loose, I say."

Weldon's look of amazement had become a stare.

"I'll do it myself," continued Nottingham, rising and taking Jed's arm. "Come, boy. There's mercy among vultures, as you shall learn by experience."

He was leading Jed toward the door when Weldon, with a face white from rage, sprang forward and arrested him.

"I say no!" he hoarsely cried, clutching Nottingham's arm, and for a moment restraining him in the center of the room.

The face that Nick turned toward his partner in rascality was fierce and menacing.

"Stand back!" he cried. "This is my move and I assume the responsibility."

Cowed by his mien and words, Weldon shrunk away, muttering a savage curse, and Jed was led into the hall.

"Let this be the last time," said Nottingham to the boy. "You can't win the battle. It is impossible. If you keep up the game it will end disastrously for you, and that when you least expect. Go to work. You are stout and active. Your hands are strong and your head clear. Take my advice. Help your mother, boy, but don't try to accomplish that which can't be done."

Nottingham had by this time opened the door and Jed could see the light of the street lamps beyond.

He looked up into the man's face and caught his eye but made no promises.

"Safety lies in discretion. Don't lose your head. Good-night." And he was pushed from the house and the door shut with a bang behind him.

Jed for a moment stood on the sidewalk in a dazed or bewildered manner. He could hardly realize that he had escaped without injury from the clutches of Holdfast & Co., and the most surprising thing of all was that the firm itself, or one of its members at least, had voluntarily released him.

The reader, therefore, can imagine Jed's feelings while he stood in front of the vultures' nest with the events we have just described fresh in his mind.

Some moments elapsed before he moved off, and even then he seemed disinclined to desert the place.

"Let out by the birds of evil!" ejaculated Jed. "Mr. Nottingham is working a scheme of his own, but just what it is time will develop. I overlooked the prize. It is somewhere in that house. Webb Weldon was coming up-stairs for 'the box' when he spied me. What does that box contain but the documents? Ah, if I had found it!"

The boy hurried on until he had crossed Scissors Simon's threshold. He found the little hunchback sitting cross-legged on the floor cutting profile portraits from memory.

"Simon," exclaimed Jed, "I want you to listen to a story."

The boy artist laid his scissors down and in a second was all attention, but before Jed began he carried a finger to his lips and by the motion commanded silence.

The Jersey boy glanced hastily toward the window, and Simon jumping up ran across the room.

"You've been followed!" cried the hunchback, returning.

"By one of the conspirators?"

"I don't know, but a man was out there. Let us go up-stairs."

The two boys ascended to one of the upper rooms and Jed went to the shuttered window and looked out through the slats.

There was a lamp across the street and directly opposite the house, and its searching beams reached to the trees that grew in front of Simon's humble domicile.

From the very moment that Jed reached the window he saw a motionless figure under one of the trees.

"Ha, captain, you are on guard, are you?" he laughed, for the man stood revealed to him as the city detective in Mark Murchison's employ.

There was now no doubt in Jed's mind that he was the person whom Simon had heard at the window, that having been frightened away for the time, he had come back to keep an eye on the boy who had refused to further his watchful schemes.

"Let him watch," said the boy artist with a light laugh. "Captain Catchem can do no harm down there. Hold! I'll take him as he is." And suiting action to his words Scissors Simon produced his famous shears and began to cut from a piece of dark paper the figure of a man under a tree.

Jed watched the rapidly moving scissors with curious delight, and laughed when Simon held up his finished portrait for inspection and approval. It was a striking picture, and one which Captain Catchem could not fail to recognize.

When Jed had related his last adventures to Simon and received in reply an opinion to the effect that Nottingham was evidently playing a game of his own, he was advised to leave the house by the rear door, thus avoiding the detective who had moved from the tree, but was still on guard.

A few moments afterward the Jersey boy was once more under the lamps of New York, and he chuckled to himself when he thought how adroitly he had fooled the nabob's detective.

If he had known why Captain Catchem waited under the tree he would have left the house by the front exit, and his failure to do so was to cost him a world of trouble.

The detective watched until he seemed to tire of his vigil, then he moved away and disappeared.

An hour afterward, as he turned a certain corner, a man with whom he nearly collided turned round and looked at him.

"That's him!" said the stranger. "That is Captain Catchem, the man he has put upon our track. I wonder what he is up to now? Is he hot on the trail, or is he still in the dark? I'd like to know."

Captain Catchem now had a gliding shadow at his heels.

The man whose attention he had attracted followed him from street to street, not losing sight of him for a moment, nor getting beyond sound of his footsteps on the sidewalk.

The result of this espionage was that Burt Butler was tracked home; he was seen to unlock a door and disappear beyond it, and the tracker took a mental photograph of the house before he moved away.

"If the boy tells Captain Catchem what he knows, the old ferret's heart will jump into his throat and nearly tickle him to death with joy," murmured the stranger. "I know I'll be forever blamed for what I did, but I couldn't see the boy treated as I know Webb wanted to treat

him. We can beat Mark Murchison despite the boy and the detective, and there's no use of taking life unless one is pushed to the wall. We're not quite there yet."

Twisting his mustache in a manner which would have caused his recognition by one of the characters of our story, the detective's shadow went back.

Some squares away he was met by a man much younger, and the two entered an eating-house where they ordered a lunch to be brought to a table in one corner.

"I've drawn up this paper which I think will finish the play," said the young man, handing a folded paper across the table.

"The other took it and holding it in the light, read:

"MARK MURCHISON:—We reject your reply as being cowardly and written in the interests of delay. The time for compromise has passed. We will carry on no more negotiations through the newspapers. We know all about the work of your hired detective, known as Captain Catchem. Unless you pay to the bearer of this letter the sum of two hundred thousand dollars the documents will be handed over to Mrs. Sarah Jeffreys, whose whereabouts are known to
HOLDFAST & Co."

"Who will take this to him?" asked the purser of the letter, looking up.

"I will!"

"When?"

"At ten to-morrow morning."

"If he refuses to comply, will the threat at the close of the letter be carried out?"

"Ha, ha, do you think I'm daft?" laughed the young man. "This is only a desperate move; that's all!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOUBLE TRICK.

THE next day, as the hour of ten approached, Mark Murchison might have been seen seated in his library which his money had furnished most sumptuously.

He was quite alone and had no thoughts nor dreams of the visitor who was soon to ring his bell.

When the bell sounded he waited until the only servant he kept had gone to the door, and watching the threshold of the library with some impatience, wondered what detained his man.

The truth is, Mark Murchison was looking for Captain Catchem, his detective, and had given the servant orders to admit him without question, but when the door which he watched opened at last, bringing to view the form of one whom he did not know, he started forward with a slight change of color.

The nabob's visitor, as has been said, was young.

He had a good figure and a pair of keen, searching eyes, which the moment they saw Murchison, regarded him with a fixed look.

The enemy of the Jeffreyses waved the man to a chair and then waited for him to open the battle.

"Mr. Mark Murchison, I believe?" began the caller.

"You are right; that is my name."

Dropping one hand into an inside pocket the visitor drew forth a letter which he handed across the table between them, and then straightening in his chair, awaited results.

Murchison opened the envelope with a slight display of nervousness. He seemed to have a presentiment that some blow was impending.

"Who sent this?" he suddenly cried.

The visitor was coolness itself.

"The signature ought to answer you," said he. Though the signature had answered Mark Murchison, he could not keep back the question.

He had glanced, first of all, at the bottom of the letter and read there the name— "Holdfast & Co."

"The devil! I know the infamous name at the foot of the communication," continued Murchison. "But who intrusted it to you for delivery?"

"The writer, perhaps. But, sir, you haven't read the letter."

"I don't know that I ought to," was the answer.

Murchison was holding the letter between finger and thumb and scowling at it until his face wore an angry cloud well charged with thunder.

"It was written to be read," continued his caller.

"I don't doubt it," and his gaze wandered to the letter.

A word or two seemed to enchain his attention. He read the first line, then the next, and did not look up until he had mastered all, when his face was bloodless and ghastly.

He threw the letter upon the table before him with an excited oath.

"That letter demands more than blood-money. I will treat it with silent contempt!" he roared.

The semblance of a derisive smile seemed to come into being at the young man's mouth. He left his chair and confronted Murchison in the attitude of one about to depart.

"Is that your reply? Have you no other?" he asked. "With silent contempt, I believe you said."

Murchison made no reply, but looked up at the speaker keenly.

A sudden thought flashed through his mind.

Might not this young man belong to Holdfast & Co.?

"Do you belong to the gang?" queried Murchison, the question being the natural result of the thought just mentioned.

"To what gang do you refer?"

"To the conspiracy against me!—to the league which is trying to bankrupt me with infamous letters like that! You would not bring it to me without some knowledge of its contents. You know them. Ah! you must belong to the gang."

These charges did not seem to frustrate Murchison's caller in the least. He rather appeared to enjoy them.

"With silent contempt, eh?" he said, coolly. "Do you stand by that answer? Will you put it down in black and white, or—"

Mark Murchison struck the top of the table with his fist and broke the sentence.

"By Jove! your coolness stamps you a member of the blood-sucking firm!" he exclaimed.

"Just as you please; but it strikes me that your epithets are more forcible than polite."

"I generally call things by their right names," responded Murchison. "You say that is the last demand?"

The young man now came back to his chair, and taking it again complacently crossed his legs.

He was Mr. Webb Weldon, as the reader has doubtless suspected ere this, and when it was necessary he could be as cool as the traditional cucumber.

His very audacity struck Murchison.

"That is the last demand," spoke Weldon, slowly taking up the nabob's words as he looked him in the eye.

"Then I am face to face at last with a member of Holdfast & Co.?"

"I do not admit that, but the last demand from the house lies before you."

The old man's eyes wandered mechanically to the paper on the table.

"You want two hundred thousand?"

"The letter says so."

"If not paid you will throw certain papers which you profess to hold into the hand of a family called Jeffreys?"

"I believe that, too, lies before you in black and white."

"Do you know this is blackmail, punishable by the statutes?"

"Come!" laughed Weldon. "I know everything you would recall to my mind. I came hither with my eyes open. There need be but one answer to the letter—yes, or no."

Before he spoke again Murchison picked up the letter and seemed to reread one of its few sentences.

"The money is to be paid to you—if paid at all?" said he.

Weldon bowed.

"Then, I presume you came prepared to turn over the—documents."

"Holdfast & Co. will keep their part of the bargain."

Murchison's eyes suddenly got a light which could not escape Weldon's look.

"I don't like to be bled," he rejoined.

"It is a fair business transaction. We give you something for something."

"A lot of so-called valuable papers for two hundred thousand in cool cash!"

"Those 'so-called valuable papers' are deemed sufficiently valuable in your eyes as to secure the services of a detective who is expected to hunt down Holdfast & Co., and, at the risk of his life, place them in your hands."

Webb Weldon was the nabob's match.

"When will the property be delivered?" questioned Murchison.

"Soon after the payment of the sum named."

The reply seemed to settle one thing in Mark Murchison's mind.

The lost papers were at that moment on his visitor's person. There was no doubt of it; his last words told as much.

A devilish scheme entered the nabob's head.

It sprung into existence complete in all its details, and seemed to tingle the blood at his finger's ends.

"When a man is at another's mercy he has to submit," he said, pushing back his chair and glancing toward a safe at one side of the room. "I won't keep you waiting long. I want this bit of infamous business over forever. I'm tired of it."

His words, spoken for a diabolical purpose, seemed to disarm Webb Weldon's suspicions.

Murchison rose and went toward the safe. The young man watched him with victory visible in his eyes.

He saw the nabob stoop before the steel door and begin to manipulate the shining knob.

"The last play won," thought he. "I'll open Nick's eye when I go back. He thought I would fail."

At this juncture Mark Murchison sprang erect and wheeling upon Weldon covered him with his revolver.

The very quickness of this move seemed to take the young man's breath. He had never seen anything like it, and he found himself wondering from where Murchison had produced the six-shooter.

"Hands down!" cried Murchison, looking like a cool maniac over the leveled weapon. "This is a game in which two can take an active hand. You want the modest sum of two hundred thousand for those documents, ha?"

Weldon did not speak.

"You have the papers on your person. Fool that you are, you had to fetch them to this house—into my castle—and make this demand when you might have known that I would not be bled to this extent. Stand up!"

The young man obeyed.

"Shall I call my servant in to rob you, or will you, on pain of death, despoil yourself?" Murchison went on, with a grin. "I grant you ten seconds of grace. Throw the papers upon the table and walk from my house alive, or drop dead in your tracks—shot by the man whom your deep villainy has rendered desperate."

There was no mistaking the looks that accompanied these words. Mark Murchison had all the appearance of a really desperate man.

Ten seconds!

Webb Weldon, caught in a trap of his own setting, inwardly cursed himself in front of the frowning pistol.

Suddenly, without a word in reply, he thrust his hand beneath his coat, and looking at Murchison jerked out a packet which he threw upon the table. It bounded up like a ball and fell to the floor on the other side.

"Now go and thank Mark Murchison for his mercy!" said the nabob.

Weldon walked from the room without a show of ceremony and when the front door of the house had closed behind him Murchison sprang forward and lifted the packet.

The following moment he cut the string and then let slip a curse.

He held nothing but blank papers in his hands!

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT IN THE LIGHT.

THE man had beaten him. In other words, he had been cleverly outwitted by Holdfast & Co., for, instead of holding in his hands the documents whose loss had cost him so much trouble and money, he held nothing but white paper.

Webb Weldon had come to the house ready to play the hand which suited his purpose best. If Murchison paid over the price demanded he would receive the papers; if he attempted to get them by force he might obtain possession of the false packet which Weldon carried in another pocket.

As we have seen, the young man frustrated the nabob by delivering up what appeared to be the precious packet, and thus managed to escape with the true one and his own life, as well.

Mark Murchison's rage knew no bounds when he realized the deception that had been practiced. For some minutes he walked the floor, raving like a madman, and his servant who heard him from a distant part of the house wondered what had happened.

"I know how the scoundrel looks and that is something," exclaimed Murchison, cooling down at last. "I can describe him for Captain Catchem's benefit, and the detective will have a link at last. I see it is a desperate game with them. The fellow took desperate chances to-night, and, curse him! beat me after all!"

Not many minutes elapsed before Murchison was on the street hastening toward the detective's office.

He was fortunate in finding Captain Catchem in, but if he had delayed his call a short time he would have missed his man altogether.

The detective followed Murchison very closely through the narrative he spun. As the rich man omitted nothing he was not questioned once to the end.

"A cool game and desperate chances," smiled the shadow.

"I should say so."

"If he had not complied with your demand what?"

"I should have killed him in his tracks."

"And found the right documents, ha?"

"Yes."

"Ain't you sorry now you did not shoot him dead?"

"By heavens, I am!" cried Murchison. "To think I had the papers in my house, almost within reach! It exasperates me. If the trick was to be played over there'd be a dead man under my roof at this moment."

"You've given me a clew," returned the detective. "I think I've seen the man you have described."

"What! think you know him, do you say?"

"I think so."

"To find him is to unearth his partner; it is to uncover Holdfast & Co."

Captain Catchem nodded.

"It is, if the boy don't interfere."

Murchison started visibly.

"What boy?" And then he bent forward and continued:

"Have you found the boy who held his tongue six years ago? Do you know where he hides? And what do you mean when you say 'if the boy don't interfere?'"

The detective looking straight at Mark Murchison said:

"I've found Jed Jeffreys."

The nabob seemed to fall back in his chair with a gasp.

"And his mother?" he asked.

"And his mother!"

For a moment a dead silence fell between the two.

"Are they in the city?" questioned Murchison.

"They are here."

"Relentless still?"

"They have no love for you."

"They never had!" exclaimed Murchison.

"If I had closed in on them when I should have done so they wouldn't bother me now. Won't the boy tell what he saw six years ago?"

"I'm afraid his lips are sealed."

"Stubborn yet, eh?"

"Yes."

It was curious to see the workings of Murchison's countenance.

"What does he say?" he queried.

"He is fighting his own battle, he tells me."

"Fighting it for what?"

"For vindication."

"I presume you did not see the mother?"

"I saw her, too."

"A veritable tigress, eh?"

"She don't look like one."

"But you don't know her. But for the mother, as I've always said, the boy would have talked when I wanted the truth. She got him to keep as a secret what he saw that day at the ravine. It was her doings, I tell you—the work of Sarah Jeffreys."

Mark Murchison spoke the widow's name with bitterness.

"I hope you will get along without drawing on the family," he continued. "If you've seen the man who visited me to-day, why, all you have to do is to hunt him up and keep him in sight. By the way, in what part of the city did you find the family?"

Captain Catchem saw how eager Murchison was to obtain the address of Jed and his mother. The nabob had some deep design in view, and believing this the detective hesitated.

"Really," said he, "I never looked at the number of the house."

"But you know the place?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose I could go to it without much trouble. O—street isn't very hard to find you know."

"Do they live there?"

Captain Catchem nodded.

"About the last place I should have searched for the fugitives," said Murchison. "Have they been in hiding all this time?"

"Not exactly in hiding," was the reply.

"How did you pick them up?"

"Partly by accident," answered the ferret, who did not seem ready to tell Murchison that he had set him on Jed's trail by his story of the boy injured in the accident in the Bowery, and

seeing that the captain was not inclined to be very communicative on this score he let the subject drop.

"I'm sorry I missed the boy at Scissors Simmons's house," murmured Captain Catchem when he heard the feet of Murchison on his stair telling him that he was at last shut of his employer and visitor. He must have caught sight of me through the shutters or he would not have quitted the building by the back way. I'm deeply interested in this case, and if I had been in Jed's place when the Jersey mansion was robbed I believe I would have kept my secrets, too."

The detective went back over Murchison's encounter with Webb Weldon and was convinced that he had several times seen the young man on a certain street which he resolved to visit as soon as night fell.

"I have a clew at last," thought the tireless captain. "I have a personal description of a member of the house of Holdfast & Co., and I shall work the line for all it is worth. The boy and his mother will baffle me if they can, and by Jupiter! I don't know but that they ought to succeed."

Night falling once more over the length and breadth of New York, found Captain Catchem, true to his promise, among the shadows of a certain street which led one into the Park visited so often by Scissors Simon, the boy artist.

It was the street upon which he thought he had several times seen a man whose appearance tallied closely with Murchison's description of his cool-headed caller, and he had resolved to haunt the thoroughfare a long time in hope of being rewarded for his pains.

Captain Catchem strolled the street for several hours. Sometimes he went into the Park whose benches were pretty well filled for the night was pleasant and the parks added to the comfort of the people.

At last during one of his extended strolls the city ferret caught sight of Scissors Simon at work on a subject who had obliged him by taking up a position under the electric light.

The detective stood aloof and watched the ingenious boy until he had finished his profile portrait and received the money for it, when he sauntered forward and halted in front of his bench.

"Want a picture?" asked Simon, catching up his scissors and taking from the little portfolio he always carried a piece of paper; but the next moment, as though he had suddenly recognized the man before him, his look became a fixed stare.

Captain Catchem smiled and bent quickly over the boy, his right hand resting on the back of the Park settee close to Simon's shoulder.

"No profile just now, Simon," said he. "When did you see Jed last?"

Scissors Simon seemed to be thrown back by the question. The next moment he laughed.

"You're a fox! I know you!" he exclaimed, evidently recalling how he had cut the detective's profile while he watched for Jed under the shade tree in front of his house.

"Never mind that," responded Captain Catchem. "You are Jed's friend, ain't you?"

"To the death!" exclaimed the boy.

"I'm glad of that. You want to help him all you can?"

"To be sure I do; but I can't see how giving him away to Captain Catchem can benefit him."

The human shadow smiled in spite of himself.

"Why can't you see thus?" he asked.

"You ought to know without asking me. You know what information you seek. Jed and I don't keep any secrets from each other. Captain Catchem, when you come to Scissors Simon for information intended to help Mark Murchison, the gold-ribbed nabob, you come to the wrong person."

The boy artist spoke with much determination.

"You don't know how the game might turn out," rejoined the detective. "I tell you—Wait a second!" And Simon called to a man who at that moment came up in the path in front of the settee:

"Hol! don't you want a profile? You're a good subject."

The gentleman addressed by Scissors Simon glanced for an instant at the boy, and then, with head erect again, kept on.

Captain Catchem out of curiosity looked toward the man and caught him in the full glare of the light that swung among the trees.

What did he see? Who was the person walking off with every line and curve of his figure calling up Mark Murchison's description of his late visitor? Could it be that same person?

The thought thrilled Captain Catchem. He forgot the boy artist on the settee.

"Let him go. I caught him the other night without his consent!" chuckled Simon.

The detective did not hear these words. The man he was looking at had turned into another path, and a moment later the ferret of Gotham had darted away, and was Webb Weldon's shadow!

CHAPTER X.

OVERHEARD.

"THIS is luck!" mentally exclaimed Captain Catchem, eying the young man while he followed him. "This is sighting Holdfast & Co. where I did not expect to get a glimpse of the firm. Now if the young chap leads me to the right place I may be able to play the best cards in the deck."

Apparently unconscious of the espionage, Weldon led the detective across the square and into the street beyond. There he encountered a man taller and older than himself and the two went away together.

Captain Catchem was now confident that he had sighted the entire firm and his inward satisfaction thereat knew no bounds.

Weldon and Nottingham walked leisurely for some distance and the detective could see that they were conversing in low tones.

He wondered if Weldon had told his companion about his visit to Mark Murchison, and as the younger man was doing most of the talking he thought he was then spinning the narrative of that event.

The detective followed the two men until they came back to the street in which he thought he had seen Weldon on several former occasions. To reach it they were compelled to cross the Park, but Scissors Simon had left his bench and Captain Catchem who was still following Holdfast & Co., saw nothing of the boy.

In course of time the trail ended beyond the door of the house which witnessed Jed's adventure when he fell into the hands of the enemy.

"At home at last!" exclaimed the detective. "This is more than luck. It is fortune. To have tracked Holdfast & Co. home is something worth achieving. This is the best link yet welded to the change."

He marked the house well before he left it, for he had resolved not to try to get beyond its doors just then. Holdfast & Co. were not likely to run off, but would remain so as to play another card against Mark Murchison.

Meantime Jed Jeffreys, the boy detective, had witnessed unseen some of the movements we have just described.

He had caught sight first of the two worthies on the street and then of Captain Catchem on their trail.

"The wily old fox has found them," thought the boy. "He will now make the most of the victory for his employer. If he can he will get hold of the documents and throw them into Mark Murchison's lap. I know him. I was fortunate in giving him the slip from Simon's house, and I don't want him to catch me at work now."

Captain Catchem had managed during his bit of shadow work to get a good view of Nick Nottingham's face. He was hoping that he would be able to recognize in the senior member of Holdfast & Co. an old offender with a bad record. In this he was not wholly disappointed, for he soon recalled him as one who had spent five years behind the bars for a crime committed before the plundering of the Jersey mansion.

Mr. Nottingham had greatly improved his appearance since quitting the prison; but to keen-eyed Burt Butler he was still his old self, no better, but a little sleeker than before.

Jed left both the detective and Holdfast & Co., and went home.

The hour was nine and the street was well thronged with people. As Jed mounted the steps he heard a shriek and then a Babel of excited voices, and running back discovered that a strange lady had been knocked down by a passing car.

In a few moments the street in the vicinity was fairly blocked by people, and some minutes passed before Jed again went up the stairs.

As he neared the door of his humble quarters he heard a voice that thrilled and startled him.

"What brings that man to our house?" Jed asked himself. "I'd as soon expect to hear the mayor talking in there as him. And he drew nigh the door and listened with his heart beating as it had not beat for many a day.

"I don't see why you won't listen to compromise," said the voice the boy had caught. "You can't expect everything. We're willing to give you a share. You and your boy mustn't hang out against reason. We hold the whole game in our hands. The cards—all of them—are ours. Yes, Sarah Jeffreys, if we say so, you will suddenly lose all your chances of getting a dollar from his coffers—"

"I don't want a dime of his money," Jed heard his mother break in. "We're not contending for riches."

The man laughed hoarsely and in derision.

"I'd think you'd take a little!" he exclaimed.

"You're not very well fixed here."

"Not very rich, that's right. We haven't starved yet, and I don't think we'll ever come to that."

"Don't tempt misfortune. You and your boy can move into a mansion within a month."

"If we follow your directions?"

"If you listen to reason."

"And help you and your companion."

"You'll be helping yourself."

A short silence followed the last words.

"Is she going to yield to him?" muttered Jed, and he stepped forward with a flash in his eyes.

"Mother must not form a partnership with that man. I thought he had a game in view when he got me out of the clutches of Holdfast & Co."

At this moment Jed heard the unseen man resume:

"You won't have to do much, woman; only let him know that you are ready to receive the papers from us and open fly his treasure doors."

"But the documents wouldn't reach me. You would be expected to keep your word with Mark Murchison."

There was no reply to this.

"Jed and I will be a party to no such scheme," continued Mrs. Jeffreys with firmness.

"You are willing to lose all, then?"

"Yes, if it must be retained in such a way."

"You are foolish. You can't get anything out of Mark Murchison without our help. You say he has wronged you and your boy. You want to get even. You want possession of the papers he lost some six years ago. They will place in your hands a weapon with which you will be able to right your wrongs. Madam, you can't win a single move without us. It is impossible. We hold the 'hand' that wins, and, anxious to lift you and your boy from penury, I have made the proposition you have just listened to."

"I reject it. We don't want his money though much of it rightfully belongs to us. I admit that without the stolen documents we cannot succeed. They are in your hands."

"Your boy thinks so, does he?"

"Yes, and so do I. You are one of the men he saw six years ago in the ravine. Don't smile and deny it. He saved you then by holding his tongue. He kept from the heels of yourself and partner in that crime the dogs of the law, for if Jed had parted with his secret Mark Murchison's detectives would have nabbed you."

If Jed could have seen beyond the door at this moment, he would have noticed a grin on the man's face.

"I see that we can't trade, Sarah Jeffreys," said the male voice, and then came to Jed's ears the shuffling of feet.

"We'll never make another offer like this. If Mark Murchison succumbs he will get the papers. If he holds out in his stubbornness they will be destroyed."

"We can't take the documents through the channel you offer them. We won't touch a dollar of the money that man controls without getting it legally. If you destroy those papers—"

Mrs. Jeffreys seemed to break her own sentence, and Jed's heart was in his throat while he listened.

"What will you do if we destroy them?" laughed the man.

"We'll make this country too hot to hold you and your companion!"

"Ho! is that all we have to fear?" was the answering sentence. "Madam, when you pit yourself and your boy, shrewd little rat though he is, against the old and experienced firm of Holdfast & Co., you get far beyond your depth. Why, we'd laugh at your efforts. What! you frighten us by a threat? It is the height of folly! We hold the trumps; we play the hand that wins, and when you reject the proposition that has been made, you lose forever all hopes of recovering what you have lost. As for your boy, let him keep away from us. We have tolerated him long enough. He owes his life to me; but if he plays shadow any longer, I won't

duplicate the mercy I have shown him. Good-night, madam."

The door near Jed opened with a suddenness that sent him backward, and if he had not fallen in the darkest part of the short hallway he would have been seen by the tall man who emerged from the room.

As it was, Jed held his breath while he watched the man, knowing that he was the renowned Nottingham of Holdfast & Co.

Jed's blood fairly boiled while he eyed the man, which was not long, for Nottingham shut the door and went down the stairs.

"If you think I will take your advice you count without your host!" exclaimed the boy, as his eye followed Nick. "You can't drive me from this trail. I will come out ahead in spite of all opposition, or I will perish in the clutches of the foe."

The following moment the Boy Shadow was in the room, and his mother had received him with an exclamation of amazed delight.

"Well, mother," exclaimed Jersey Jed, "the slick rascal got no satisfaction."

"Not from me, my boy. He came with a cool proposition which I could not for a moment entertain. He wanted to take us into the house of Holdfast & Co. as sort of silent partners."

"I thought he had a scheme in view when he helped me out of the trap I got into by hunting for the documents. We know him now, mother. What did he call himself?"

"Robert Randall."

"Alias Nicholas Nottingham!" laughed Jed. "Holdfast & Co. will now play a desperate hand. It will take all the shrewdness Captain Catchem and I possess to balk the firm."

"What, have you leagued yourself to the detective?" asked Mrs. Jeffreys with a start.

"By no means, mother. I'm still Jed Jeffreys, the independent shadow."

CHAPTER XI.

JED'S NEW MOVE.

JERSEY JED of course knew nothing concerning Webb Weldon's visit to Mark Murchison, and its results.

That a visit of some sort was contemplated, he knew from what he had seen and heard from the roof outside the conspirators' window; but Nottingham's visit to his mother seemed to indicate that the call had been made only to result in failure.

The boy detective felt that the pair would now resort to something desperate, inasmuch as Weldon had to make a showing soon, in order to win the young lady in the up-town mansion.

Jed wondered if the young lady knew anything about Weldon's real character, and to discover this he resolved to pay her the earliest visit he could.

The sun was midway between dawn and noon the following day, when the Jersey boy presented himself at the door of a well-to-do house in the upper part of the city.

He had dressed himself with more than usual care, for he was about to encounter one whom he had never met before, and he did not want his looks to repulse him at the outset.

When he told the person who opened the door that he had called on business with "Miss Lola," he was very speedily admitted and escorted into the parlor.

"She shall be called," said the servant, leaving him, and Jed sat down to watch the door and wonder what sort of a young lady had captivated Webb Weldon.

He was not left to himself a great while when a rustle of garments attracted him, the door opened, and Lola Lewis stood before him.

The parlor was a little too dark to let him see her as he wanted to; but when the young lady parted the heavy curtains and admitted a flood of light, he started at sight of her.

Lola Lewis was a beautiful girl of twenty. She possessed a willowy, sylph-like figure, the movements of which were grace itself; her eyes were large and lustrous, her hair a rich chestnut, and very abundant.

Jed did not wonder that she had captivated Webb Weldon, but he could not help thinking that the young scamp loved her fortune more than herself.

"You do not know me?" said Jed, seeing the girl's eyes regarding him with an inquisitive stare. "We have never met before. I am Jed Jeffreys, once of Jersey, now of New York."

Lola smiled, showing for an instant her pearly teeth.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Jeffreys," she replied, in a pleasant voice. "Marie told me that you have called on business, but I cannot imagine its nature."

She was very curious and eager, this fair girl, and Jed concluded to break the ice without further preliminaries.

"I have called to acquaint you with the character of a person of whom I fear you know but too little," said he.

Lola started as though she had heard something thrilling.

She said nothing, but continued to look at Jed in a strange manner.

"Your friend, Mr. Weldon," resumed the boy, when Lola leaned suddenly toward him and held up a finger.

"What! have you come to talk of him?" she exclaimed. "If so, lower your voice," and the speaker looked furtively toward the door.

"Isn't a mention of him agreeable here? I thought—"

"It is agreeable to a part of this house—not to all of it," was the prompt response. "Mr. Webb Weldon, did you say? Do you know him?"

"I have the honor to know of him, if an honor it be," said Jed.

"Then you don't esteem the knowledge you mention a very great honor; I can see that, Mr. Jeffreys."

"You are right. I don't call it a great thing to know Webb Weldon. I understand that he comes to this house with designs on the lady I address."

Lola colored suddenly, and then turned pale.

"I don't see why I should keep anything back, seeing that you already know so much, and believing that you are my friend."

"You can proceed with perfect safety," Jed bowed as he spoke. "I know a good deal about this snake in the grass."

"He comes to this house without my consent, but I am powerless," continued Lola, her tones becoming indignant ones. "Somehow or other he has wormed himself into my father's favor, but I despise him. He represents that he is very wealthy, and wealth, I am sorry to say, is the 'open sesame' to that parent's heart. You cannot know the full extent of the mischief Webb Weldon has wrought since crossing my path. His shadow has blighted my whole life, and if he carries out his real scheme, which I fear he will be able to do with my father's assistance, I shall become very unhappy indeed."

"But does your father suspect that Webb Weldon may be a bad character—that some of his past exploits may have been criminal?"

"No, I am sure that he has not thought of that. It is Webb Weldon's fortune that catches my father."

"His fortune?" echoed Jed, with an irrepressible laugh.

"When did he get one?"

"From a rich relative who died a few months ago. The legacy has not yet been paid over, but he is to make a showing of wealth within the next few days. Such seems to be the agreement between my father and him."

"Why, Miss Lola, this sweet-scented rascal hasn't fifty dollars to his name. He has lost no relative lately, unless the sheriff has hanged one, and the money he expects to show in order to clinch the scheme he is working on your father he hopes to wring from the coffers of a certain man whose name is no better than his own."

"I wish you could prove this!" exclaimed Lola Lewis. "I would owe you my life-long thanks, boy, if you could expose this infamous piece of business the object of which is the destruction of my happiness."

"That's just what fetched me to you," rejoined Jed. "I'm on the war-path and a part of my campaign is against Holdfast & Co."

At sound of this name the young lady seemed to fall back and grow white again.

"Wait until I return," she said, rising hurriedly, and the next moment Jed found himself the sole occupant of the parlor.

He was not kept in solitude long, for Lola soon returned, bearing in her hand a piece of paper which she extended to Jed as she came to a halt before him.

"I will tell you why the mention of Holdfast & Co., startled me," she said. "I found this bit of paper on the floor of the library immediately after one of Webb Weldon's visits. I have shown it to no one until now. It seemed to be a threat addressed to some one, and was the first thing that rendered me suspicious of his character."

Jed took the paper and leaned toward the window.

"Hol!" he exclaimed, with a glance toward Lola, when he had ran his eyes over the writing. "Mr. Webb Weldon would not have lost this—not for the world. He evidently doesn't suspect

that it fell into your hands. It shows what he is doing. He is playing for the wealth he must show to win you, miss. This letter would have found its way into Mark Murchison's hands if the writer had not lost it. It is signed Holdfast & Co., and is, indeed, a threat, and a part of the game the firm is playing. Keep it, miss. Don't let that paper slip through your hands. If it weighed a hundred pounds it would be worth its weight in gold to you."

"How?"

"In helping to baffle these precious rascals."

"Webb Weldon, then, has a partner?"

"Yes, a big fellow named Nottingham, Webb's senior in age, though not in adroit rascality. He'd be hard to beat at that, I'm thinking."

Lola looked at the dropped letter a moment and then put it away.

"If I could see your father I think I could convince him that all that glitters is not gold," pursued Jed. "Does he trust Webb Weldon?"

"He seems to believe every thing he tells him."

"But should the legacy story be exploded, what?"

"It would have to be done effectually to open his eyes. He has told me that I am to become Webb Weldon's bride when he convinces him, as he says he can, and will, that he has one hundred thousand dollars in his own right."

"It looks very much like a business bargain!" indignantly cried the Jersey boy.

"What else is it?" was the response. "My heart alternately burns and bleeds when I think of it. I am now convinced by you that Webb Weldon is a thorough-paced villain. Not only this, but that he is at the bottom of a game for the fortune which, as is well known, I will possess on my wedding morn. If he fails to make the showing he is to make, the chances are that he will lose the play; but men of his stamp are fertile in invention."

"I know that, and what Holdfast & Co. don't think about in rascality isn't worth fooling with. Now that you know some thing from 'the outside' about Webb Weldon, that you know also that you have friends there, I will take my leave."

"I owe you my grateful thanks!" exclaimed Lola. "If you want help in some of your undertakings let me refer you to a friend who will render all the assistance in his power."

The fair girl flushed deeply as she spoke.

Taking from her pocket a small memorandum, she wrote upon one leaf which she tore off and handed to Jed. The Jersey boy glanced at the page, read thereon: "Noel Weymouth, No. 692 N—street, city," and put it in his pocket.

He now understood the coloring which had accompanied the giving of the address.

Noel Weymouth was the holder of the young girl's affections!

"Keep up a stout heart," advised Jed, ere he withdrew. "I am into this campaign to balk the plans of two precious villains, or know why not. If Webb Weldon ever shows that hundred thousand and claims you on the strength of it, I'll get me to a nunnery, ha, ha!"

And again reading thankfulness in Lola's eyes, he withdrew.

"The game is for two fortunes instead of one," he commented when he found himself on the street again. "I'll make the loss of that letter cost Webb Weldon dearly. It is mine whenever I want it, and Lola won't let it slip through her fingers. Matters are coming to a crisis pretty fast. Captain Catchem must work like a beaver to win the game for his employer. But there's another face in the Lewis house that interests me as much as Lola's does. I've seen Marie, the servant, before; but where? Wait; let me think."

Jed, who had by this time reached a Park, turned aside and took a seat under the trees.

"I have it! It comes back to me like a flash!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I knew I had seen that woman before. She is Mark Murchison's old servant, Polly. She served him when his safe was plundered by Holdfast & Co. That woman is a spy!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE NABOB'S TARTAR.

It did not take the boy detective very long to see that Webb Weldon had placed a spy in Lola's home.

If the servant was playing that role now what sort of one had she played six years before? Had she not admitted the robbers to Mark Murchison's house, thus helping them to plunder her master?

Polly had never been suspected by the simple Jersey folk. She disappeared soon after the robbery and Jed had not once encountered her in all those years.

For a moment he thought of sending Lola a note of warning, but fearing that it might fall into Polly's hands, he did not take this step.

"I'll see what is in this suspicion without alarming Lola," he said to himself. "If Polly is in Webb Weldon's employ now she was then, and can, if she will, give some damaging testimony against Holdfast & Co."

Jed soon afterward became aware that he was being watched.

A few yards beyond the bench which he had occupied in the Park stood an elderly gentleman who tried to seem oblivious of the boy's presence.

"Ha! Mark Murchison, when did you discover me?" thought the young shadow. "Has Captain Catchem enabled you to recognize me on sight? or is this the first time you have seen me since I eluded your detectives over in Jersey?"

If the man was Mark Murchison he had altered his appearance, though not enough, as we have seen, to prevent Jed from spotting him.

Jed Jeffreys sat quite a while longer, apparently unaware of the sly espionage which the nabob had begun, and when he rose and sauntered off very leisurely, he saw Murchison following.

If the time had been night, it would not have been difficult to elude his shadow, but in broad daylight he found that task not an easy one.

He was crossing a street not far from the confines of the Park when he heard a quick step behind, and looking up the next moment, he beheld the piercing eyes of Murchison.

Of course the recognition was now mutual.

"It is a long lane that turns not!" exclaimed the nabob, whose eyes could not keep back his satisfaction.

Jed smiled.

"Do you think it has turned?" he queried.

"It certainly has," was the instant response.

"Boy, I want you to go home with me."

"With you?"

"Yes."

Jed thought rapidly.

Why does this man want me to go with him? What has he to say? Can I help our cause by humoring him? I don't see how I can injure it. I believe I am a match for Mark Murchison, if I am a boy.

"Do you live near?" asked Jed.

"Ten minutes' walk."

"Lead on, then."

Mark Murchison seemed delighted with his easy victory, and a minute later was walking rapidly off with Jersey Jed trotting alongside.

The couple did not exchange many words during their walk, and the few were commonplace ones.

When Jed went up the steps and into the nabob's house he wondered anew what would be the outcome of his singular adventure.

Murchison led the way to the library—to the same room in which but a few hours before he had met Webb Weldon in the game which might be termed a draw.

"How's your mother?" suddenly asked the old man, turning upon Jed who stood near the table.

"My mother?" echoed the boy.

"Yes. You live with her. Come, don't try to deceive me for that can't be done. I know too much. Does she hate me like she used to?"

Here was an opportunity which the boy could not let slip.

"She hasn't seen anything in your course during the past ten years to change her opinion," said he.

"I haven't crossed her path once in all that time. If you two had treated me right after the robbery things might be different now."

"You mean if I had told what I knew about the two men?"

Murchison made no reply but his look said: "Yes, that's what I mean."

"You see," continued Jed, "you ought not to have expected me to favor you, not under those extraordinary circumstances even."

"You aided and abetted crime on that occasion."

"That's what some people say I did."

"You helped those scoundrels off. They got away with the plunder and are unpunished today, simply because you would not tell the truth."

"Do you want me to tell it now?"

Mark Murchison, who was eying Jed from across his heavy writing-table, leaned back and took a long breath.

"I'm afraid you've kept silence too long," he rejoined. "Men, criminals especially, change very much in six years."

"Can't your detectives find the trail?"

"I'm not employing any such people now."

Jed wondered how Mark Murchison could sit there and coolly tell him this after all he knew about Captain Catchem's work; but he gave the nabob to believe that he took his word for the truth.

"Now, what would you give for information leading to the whereabouts of those two men?" queried the boy.

"A good deal. I'd be willing to delight your eyes with a healthy cheek."

"Is that all?"

Murchison looked astonished.

"What more could you ask?" he exclaimed.

"Would you be willing to present us with a certain paper which you might recover by the arrest of the robbers?"

Some color left the face into which the boy looked.

"You seem to think, like your mother used to, that there are in existence certain documents of priceless value to your family," he said.

"I know it!" cried Jed, rising. "Mark Murchison, you know that while those papers remain out of our hands they blight my dead father's reputation. We implored you to give them up years ago, but you would not. Heaven knows why you did not destroy them a thousand times over when you could have done so. A strange fate protected them. They passed from your hands at last and became the spoil of two adroit robbers. That they are still in existence, you know or firmly believe; and to-day you have a detective on the trail, even while you play fast and loose with the masked plunderers of Oak Mansion."

Murchison showed his amazement at these words in his look.

"I am willing to treat with you, but on one condition," continued Jed. "You must restore those papers. You must turn them over to me the moment they fall into your hands."

"That's asking a good deal, boy," was the reply. "Don't you think it is, seeing what has already happened?"

"It is simple justice!" promptly retorted the young detective. "It is justice to my mother, whose life has been in the shadow of disgrace so long."

"I can't do all this. You have no right to ask the favor at my hands."

"No right?" and the Jersey boy sprung to the table and striking it with his clenched hand looked across it into the nabob's face. "Do you sit there and tell me I have no right to seek the righting of an infamous wrong? Shame upon you, Mark Murchison! If you are not disposed to make amends for the past at this time, the hour may come when you will not be asked to make them."

Murchison burst into a coarse laugh under which the boy's cheeks flashed crimson.

"You need not have brought me to this house," resumed Jed after a brief pause. "Since nothing good can come of this interview, I will take my leave."

He crossed the room to the door by which he had entered the library, followed all the time by the searching eyes of the man at the table.

"Good-night, if you are determined to go,"

Jed bowed stiffly. At the same time he laid his hand on the knob, but the door did not open.

In an instant the thought that he was a prisoner in Murchison's handsome house flashed through his mind.

"Open the door!" he demanded, stepping back and drawing his figure up to its true position.

"I'm not holding it," answered the man.

"No, but you have locked it."

A second's silence followed Jed's speech.

"If you will listen to reason and show yourself tractable there will be no prison doors for you," rejoined Murchison.

"If I betray my cause, you mean."

"Your cause, ha, ha, ha!"

It was a cold, cruel and heartless laugh, and seemed to set the boy's every nerve atingle with indignation.

"I will betray nothing, Mark Murchison. I will yield no point. You have Captain Catchem in your employ. If he can outwit Holdfast & Co., well and good. I am your prisoner, am I? Well, it shall prove the dearest victory of your life!"

Jed finished but there was from the astonished man, when he looked squarely in the face.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOLDFAST & CO. DISSOLVES.

MR. WEBB WELDON'S failure to bargain with Mark Murchison had somewhat discouraged, though it did not baffle, the young man.

He was resolved to beat the nabob despite his stubbornness, for he knew that without some showing of means he would not be able to capture Lola Lewis and her father.

He was on the street a short time after Jed's interview with that young lady when he felt his arm gently touched, and the next moment he was looking into the face of a woman who had come along-side.

"Ah, Polly," exclaimed Weldon. "What has happened?"

"A good deal, sir," was the reply.

"Is it disastrous?"

"I don't know what you will think of it; but I wouldn't call it very good news."

Webb Weldon conducted the woman to his own lodgings, he was not far from them at the time of the meeting, and in a short time he knew all about the boy detective's visit.

Polly had recognized Jed, and had also played listener to her own advantage.

"I don't like this sudden turning of the tide," said Weldon, with a shake of his head. "That boy is up to everything. He is as shrewd as a lynx. You don't think he recognized you, Polly?"

"Of course he didn't, though the moment I opened the door I knew him."

"Polly, you must get hold of that letter I lost," continued Weldon, exhibiting a good deal of anxiety. "Lola could have made nothing out of it, but the boy knew it the minute he clapped eyes upon it. I knew I had lost it, but never dreamed that it slipped from me in her house."

"I'll get it!" cried the woman, confidently.

"If she should show it to her father—"

"She'll not do that," broke in Polly Pindar.

"She'll take the boy's advice and hold it till he calls for it in the line of his work."

"Where does she keep it?"

"In her boudoir."

"Do you ever go there?"

"Quite often. That's a part of my duty, you know," smiled Webb Weldon's spy. "I'm her maid and have free access to every part of the house."

"But knowing what she does about the letter will render her suspicious."

"That would be natural, you know; but I'll get hold of it all the same. Lola keeps no safe in her room, and I know what keys will fit certain locks."

"You're worth your weight in gold, Polly!" exclaimed Weldon, at which the woman smiled. "When we win the game you'll not be forgotten."

"I hope not," was the reply.

An hour later Weldon might have been seen sitting cross-legged on a settee in the nearest park enjoying a cigar as though nothing troubled him.

He seemed to be waiting for some one, and by and by a man approached and dropped beside him.

It was our old acquaintance Nick Nottingham, and Holdfast & Co. was intact again.

Weldon had resolved to say nothing about what Polly had told him; he would let the girl capture the letter, making sure of it before telling Nottingham anything, even if he told him then.

"The old fellow is scenting us," were Nick's first serious words, and the reader may be sure that they startled Weldon.

"The old fellow?" he echoed, not exactly certain in his own mind about the "old fellow's" identity.

"I mean his detective—Captain Catchem," answered Nottingham.

"Oho! scented us, has he? Are you sure of that?"

"He's been watching me at any rate—watching me like a hawk."

"When did you catch him at work?"

"Not an hour ago."

"Where was he?"

"On the street."

"And you?"

"I let him have his look out just as if it wasn't the slightest consequence to me."

"But it was, eh, Nick?"

"All the consequence in the world."

"How do you think he came to suspect us? Where did he pick up the clew?"

"Hang me, if I know!"

"Don't you think he may have seen the boy?"

Weldon spoke bitterly. It was Jed who had

warned Lola against him, and he hated the young Jerseyite more than ever.

"I could throttle the young lynx!" he went on, before Nottingham could reply. "I think you did the business a hard turn when you let him out of the trap; but don't curse me for it, Nick. We don't see alike sometimes. If Captain Catchem has formed an alliance with the boy—"

"He can't do that!" interrupted Nottingham, remembering his late call on Mrs. Jeffreys.

"The Jeffreyses will trust no party but themselves. I know that."

"But it isn't pleasant to be watched at this stage of the game by a man like Captain Catchem who knows about my visit to Murchison, and who may have some secret knowledge of the house of Holdfast & Co. besides. We must change quarters, Nick. The nest we have occupied so long must be deserted."

Nottingham bowed his acquiescence to this suggestion. He had been thinking of such a move, and in a few moments had proposed a quarter of the city which seemed to meet with Weldon's approval.

"We'll go to-night," said he. "We'll fold our tents like the Arabs and steal away. Mark Murchison's ferret will thus be cleverly beaten, and we can direct our attack from new ground. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm not going to drop our 'hand;' you may depend on that," was the quick retort. "There's too much at stake."

"A wife, eh?" grinned Nottingham.

"And two fortunes besides!"

Nottingham looked away across the grass of the Park, and his lips quivered a moment, and then met.

"You are right, Webb; there is a great deal at stake just now," said he, without looking at his companion. "We win much if we win; if, on the other hand, we lose, we lose everything. Let us fall into Mark Murchison's clutches, and you know what will happen."

Weldon, who had a deep-seated horror of prison cells, shuddered; but he chased that feeling away, replying almost gayly:

"We never counted on failure, ha, ha! When we are rich again, Nick, two city nabobs, we'll look back at our little scheme and enjoy it."

Nottingham did not speak. A shadow had come over his face, and he was looking across the grass again.

By-and-by the men arose and walked away.

"Do you see anything of him?" queried Weldon, in low tones, when they had gone some distance.

"No. I keep my eyes open, you may be sure," was the response. "Captain Catchem has lost me again, but there's no telling for how long."

"Forever, I trust!"

These three words found a responsive echo in Nottingham's heart. Somehow or other a feeling of fear seemed to have taken possession of Weldon's partner. He was superstitious, like all men of his class, had his ups and downs, but Weldon could see nothing that should greatly discourage him just then.

"What's to be the next move on the old man?" suddenly asked Nottingham.

"A closing in one. A deep play that will win the game."

"That's just what it should be," responded Nottingham. "Sarah Jeffreys was very stubborn."

Weldon nearly stopped at these words.

"When was she stubborn?" he asked.

"When I offered to share with her, if she would agree to let us make real use of her in the play."

"Did you do this?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Oh, a few hours ago," replied Nottingham, half consciously.

"Where?"

"At her house."

"And she refused?"

"Refused utterly."

"Were you alone?"

"Quite."

"Are you sure there was no listener?"

"As sure as any one can be who doesn't know everything. Sarah Jeffreys wants the papers. She will listen to nothing else."

"She wants the cash!" exclaimed Weldon. "We can't give them to her. We know what they're worth to her and her boy; but, by Heaven, they're valuable to us as well. What if we give that woman—the mother of the young street spy—these documents? I'd give them to the fire first!"

The two men separated some distance further

on, agreeing to meet at their old quarters at ten o'clock that night, when the change of nests would begin.

Webb Weldon thought of Nottingham's mood a great deal during the day. He sometimes believed that his companion had softened toward the Jersey widow, that he would be willing to give up the stolen documents rather than destroy them. Nottingham had been to prison; he knew what prison life was, and it was natural that he should have no desire to go back to it.

But to lose the prize now was not to be thought of. He had risked too much. He had a wife and a fortune in his hands if he could but close on both within the next few hours. Mark Murchison should pay two hundred thousand dollars for the papers, and that before many hours had elapsed, and despite Captain Catchem and the Jersey boy.

Weldon put in the time as best he could until the hour arrived for the rendezvous at the house. He was promptly on time.

Going up-stairs, he opened the door of their quarters and went in.

A light was burning over the table, a chair was overturned in the center of the room.

Weldon happened to look toward the bed.

There upon the covering, with feet hanging down and nearly touching the floor, lay the body of a man.

The overturned chair had prepared Weldon for something, but not for anything of this startling nature.

Too startled to cry out, he sprang toward the bed and bent over the stiffened figure of Nottingham.

"In Heaven's name, whose work is this?" cried the young man, glued to the spot, as it were, by the ghastly sight before him.

There was no reply, for the dead do not speak; and after a minute of silence, Weldon fell back.

He now saw that some one had ransacked the room. Drawers had been opened and looked into, furniture had been removed; in short, every inch of space had been searched.

"There's a deep mystery about this," thought Weldon. "Nick has been murdered, and the hand that did the deed searched the premises. But it found nothing. No! I have the prize in my own keeping. Now there will be no division. I will hold everything. Holdfast & Co. stands dissolved, but the living member will reap the rich rewards of the game!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A STARTLING ITEM.

It did not occur to Webb Weldon when he went out that he might be suspected of the crime which had been committed.

He was Nottingham's friend and companion. They had occupied the quarters together. Friends sometimes quarrel, and where there should be friendship, there's oftentimes crime.

Webb was some distance away before his real peril occurred to him.

If it should be discovered that Nottingham had been choked to death in a struggle, why should they not suspect him?

He could prove no *alibi* that would satisfy Captain Catchem, though his hands were as clear of Nottingham's blood as the hands of a babe.

What if he were arrested? Then, how much longer could he hold the papers? They would be taken with him, and turned over to Mark Murchison; and the game would be at an end!

These thoughts were enough to blanch his cheeks. They filled him with an indefinable fear that quickened his gait, and ere long he was like a real murderer, flying from the scene of his crime.

Who had killed Nottingham?

Had the detective been caught in the house by his friend? Was Captain Catchem guilty of murder, though perhaps in the heat of a struggle for life?

If he was, he (Weldon) would not dare charge him with the deed. Not for the world would he do this.

The city clocks were denoting the approach of midnight before the young man had cooled down enough to think rationally.

He remembered that Polly, the spy in Lola's home, was to meet him early the following morning, that, if not intercepted on the street, she would come to the scene of Nottingham's death, and perhaps fall into the hands of the police.

This must not happen.

Hopeful of seeing the girl despite the lateness of the hour, Weldon bent his steps toward Lola's house.

All at once he stopped and stared at a figure directly before him.

"What brings him out at this hour?" he mentally exclaimed, as well he might, for the man ahead was Murchison, the nabob.

With their last exciting meeting fresh in his thoughts, Weldon did not want to encounter the man he was trying to rob by blackmail. He would see Murchison some other time, when he had perfected his plans, perhaps to-morrow.

He followed Murchison, however, up one street and down another to the very door of his house, beyond which he disappeared.

Having done this, Weldon hastened on and soon reached the vicinity of Lola's home. But, Polly did not reward him with so much as a glimpse of herself.

He wondered if she had tried to obtain possession of the paper he had dropped in the library. He could trust Polly, for she had assisted at the opening of the game against Murchison and she durst not fail him now.

Weldon looked up at the house for awhile and then disappointed went away.

"I'll come around to-morrow and catch Polly before she can get to the old quarters," he murmured. "Now, I'll go to the new ones and turn in."

The new quarters were in a different part of the city from that which contained the others, and when Weldon had entered he locked the door, pulled down the blinds and threw himself into a chair.

Once or twice during his tramp he had put his hand against his bosom as if to make sure that something beneath his coat was safe.

He sat there in the dim light of a gas-jet and laid his plans anew.

Nottingham's death should not weaken him. It should not prevent Mark Murchison from paying the two hundred thousand for the papers, nor keep him from winning Lola and her fortune.

Amidst all this one query—always the same one—would come up:

Who killed Nottingham?

He went to bed, but not to sleep. He lay awake, hearing with terrible distinctness the slightest sounds, and still haunted by that ever-recurring question.

He was up soon after daylight and down on the street before the chilliness that came up from the bay had departed.

So well disguised that his closest acquaintances, he had few such, however, would not have recognized him, Weldon went to watch for Polly.

He had said to himself that he would have to keep a sharp looking out for Captain Catchem and Jersey Jed, not knowing, of course, that the boy had fallen into the nabob's power.

On his way up-town he bought the first morning paper that came in his way and took to reading it while he walked.

All at once his eyes fell upon the following paragraph:

FOUND DEAD—Last night, just before twelve, Mrs. Pope, who rents furnished rooms to gentlemen at No. 200 C—street, found one of her lodgers dead on the bed in an apartment which he occupied with a friend. Mrs. Pope was out during the early part of the evening, and on going to her room found the lodger's door open, an unusual occurrence; and on investigation, discovered the man dead, as mentioned above. He had been dead some time, and the doctor who was called in pronounced the cause of the death heart failure. Deceased was a large, rather fine-looking man named Nathan, and an exceptional lodger.

It may be supposed that Weldon did not miss a word of this item which would not be so much as seen by thousands.

"Nathan" was Nottingham's name to those who knew him as Mrs. Pope's lodger.

"Heart failure, eh?" ejaculated the young man. "I say 'no!' I don't care what the doctor says. Didn't I see finger-marks on his throat? and does a man who dies from an attack of heart disease ransack his own room and rumple the bed on which he is found? What will Captain Catchem say when he reads that?" And Weldon thrust the paper into his pocket and quickened his steps.

He had to wait several hours with eyes upon Lola's house before the door opened to let any one out.

At sight of Polly his heart gave a quick throb and a few seconds later he was walking beside his spy on the next street.

"I told you I'd get it," said the girl, her dark eyes sparkling with triumph.

"Ah! did you succeed?"

"When did I fail?"

"Never, Polly."

Polly took from her bosom a piece of paper which she handed to Weldon, and the next moment it was again hidden.

"Did it cost you any hard work?" he asked.

"I had to play a sleek game," was the reply. "I found it in her boudoir. She will not think to look for it until the boy Jed makes a movement."

"That will never be if I can prevent!" cried Weldon.

"Lola met her father on the stairs last night."

"Ah! Were there words, Polly?"

"Yes."

"Did she intimate that she knew anything about me?"

"She told him that you were no more entitled to the fortune you expect to show than she was."

"That was putting it very plain," smiled Weldon, shrugging his shoulders. "What did he say?"

"Don't trouble yourself about Mr. Weldon, child," he answered; "if he shows the sum he expects, you become his wife!"

There was a slight cry from Lola, a firmly spoken "Never!" and they parted.

"I see! She relies on the boy spy to baffle us, Polly; but in doing so she clings to a rope of sand."

"Where is the boy?"

"At home, probably."

"And Nick?"

Weldon started at the last query.

"Do you read the papers, Polly?" he asked.

"Now and then."

He took from his pocket the one he had lately placed there, and handed it to her, so folded that the item above given could not escape her eye.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the girl, losing color. "There's but two of us now!"

"You and I," said Weldon.

"Well, Polly, there won't be so many shares."

The blanched girl did not share the apparent merriment in which his words were couched. She was looking at the paper, reading for the second time the paragraph which told her that the house of Holdfast & Co. had now but one member.

After they had walked some distance they separated, Polly turning back, and the young man keeping on, down-town.

He passed within a square of Mark Murchison's house, but did not think of visiting its master—not just then, at least.

"I'll throw down the last card to-night, and it will be a trump," muttered Weldon.

"I won't play with the victim any longer. I've got the damaging paper which Lola and the boy might have used against me. Now, Mark Murchison must come to my terms, or go to prison for his old offense."

At that very moment Captain Catchem was ringing the Murchison door-bell.

When he had been admitted he walked into the library and was welcomed by his employer.

"Here, what does this mean?" asked the hounded nabob, pushing toward the detective a paper, a paragraph in which he had marked.

"That's what I came to talk about," was the response, for Captain Catchem had seen at a glance that an account of Nottingham's death was before him.

"Good! Is 'heart failure' to baffle us after all?"

"It hasn't interfered as yet. That item is misleading. Nottingham, *alias* Nathan, was murdered, choked to death at the end of a struggle for life!"

Mark Murchison changed color until he was as white as the wall.

CHAPTER XV.

RENTS IN A CARPET.

THE reader will readily remember that we left Jed practically a prisoner in Murchison's house.

He did not remain shut up long.

Fearing to run the risk of keeping him in confinement, for he knew that Jed's prolonged absence would alarm his mother who would naturally think of him as being connected with that absence, and seeing no prospects of bringing the boy to terms, he released him that same night.

Jed was surprised. He expected to remain some time under the nabob's roof, and his pleasure, though not openly manifested, was unbounded when he found himself on the street once more.

He was among the first morning readers whose eyes happened to alight on the paragraph concerning Nottingham's death.

Jed read it twice before he fairly caught his

breath and then he looked up from the paper bewildered.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother, alarmed.

"Listen. Here's a new move in the game. Death's won a toss, mother," and the Jersey boy read aloud the startling item.

"It's bad for us, I'm afraid," observed Jed, laying the paper down. "The firm of Holdfast & Co. is now dissolved, but one of the partners holds the stock. Webb Weldon has no sympathy for us, Nottingham had a little. The young rascal will destroy those papers sooner than give them to us. If he cannot bargain with Mark Murchison and thus win Lola, he will make sure that we do not benefit by his failure. That is Weldon to a 'T.' Though the youngest, he is the greater villain of the two. I'm going to look into this affair."

"What affair?"

"The sudden death of Nick Nottingham."

A minute afterward Jed was on the street again, and it did not take him long to reach the scene of the tragedy.

He found that the body had been taken to the nearest undertaking establishment, but, as Mrs. Pope, the landlady, was inclined to be talkative, he managed to linger on the premises.

"His friend hasn't come back yet," said Mrs. Pope.

"Oh, he didn't live alone, then?" exclaimed Jed, feigning surprise.

"He roomed with a younger friend. They got along very well together. The other may be out of the city, and I'm sure he'll be terribly shocked when he hears of it."

"Didn't you hear any noise, madame?"

"He must have died while I was out. I didn't come home till late, and he had been dead some time."

"Do you think he died very hard?"

"I don't think he did."

"Nothing disarranged, eh?"

"See here, What are you hinting at, boy? Don't you think it was heart disease?"

"Why should I doubt it? The doctors ought to know. You see, Mr. Nathan and I were somewhat acquainted. Indeed, he held possession of some papers which belong to me, and I'm naturally anxious—"

"To know what became of them?"

"Yes; that's about it."

"Then go up-stairs and look for them," said the woman promptly. "Nothing's been disturbed since, and nobody's gone to the room without my knowledge."

Jed was only too eager to accept the invitation thus extended.

Instructed how to find the late quarters of Holdfast & Co., and provided with a key to the door, he went up-stairs and entered the room.

He shut the door carefully behind him and turned on the gas.

"If Webb Weldon hasn't been back he never intends to come," thought Jed. "He knows of Nottingham's death, and that's what keeps him away."

The boy detective fell to work inspecting the apartment, and little or nothing escaped his prying eyes.

Of course he did not expect to find the precious documents concealed anywhere in the room. He believed them to be in the hands of Webb Weldon, and therefore he did not look for them.

In point of fact, Jed did not take much stock in the newspaper story of Nottingham's death. It was unaccountably strange to him that an unseen power should remove the big man at that particular stage of the game.

All at once his eye caught sight of a rip in the carpet. He bent over and scanned it closely.

"There was a struggle here between two men," said he. "Here is another cut, and here the carpet has been torn loose."

He was down on his knees hunting over the floor, for the case had become very interesting, when the door opened.

Jed looked over his shoulder at the sound the opening made, saw the tall figure of a man between him and the step, and then sprung to his feet.

The next instant he stood face to face with Captain Catchem!

The detective smiled at the boy's scare and said as he came forward:

"Did I catch you looking for diamonds, boy? How many has the floor yielded, anyhow?"

"You know there are no diamonds here, Captain Catchem."

The city shadow looked down at the carpet and then into Jed's face.

"I've been wanting to see you for some time. You eluded me the other night by quitting Scissors Simon's house by the back door."

"I saw you under the tree and the boy took your profile. I thought I did not want to run into your arms just then, and so I gave you the slip."

"We should not play against one another, Master Jeffreys."

"But you're in his employ. You are working for Mark Murchison, the man who has blighted my mother's life."

"That's just what I want to hear about," said the detective. "Sit down there and tell me."

The young shadow thought Captain Catchem's face had an expression he had never seen there before.

"Don't fear me," continued the detective, smiling. "I'm not quite as black as they paint me. We'll talk about the man who died in this room after you have told your story."

Thus urged on, Jed talked rapidly and without being interrupted for some minutes. He told Captain Catchem all he knew about Mark Murchison, how the nabob obtained his first riches; he lived in Jersey up to the time of the robbery six years before.

He also went into his own history and that of his mother. He told how many years before, before he was born, Mark Murchison, who was his father's cousin, had managed to settle upon his father a crime of which he was innocent; how John Jeffreys went to prison, suffering for the deed of another; how years afterward he forced Mark Murchison to draw up papers confessing his own guilt, and finally, how these papers were stolen, and how, when asked to surrender them, Murchison laughed, and John Jeffreys died of a broken heart with his name sullied before the world.

Captain Catchem did not let a word of Jed's story escape him. He listened as he had probably never listened before to a narrative of the kind, and Jed thought at times that the detective's eyes flashed with indignation.

"It is a strange story," said the city ferret, when the boy had concluded.

"Would to Heaven there were no truth in it!" was the reply. "Captain Catchem, you now know why I want to put my hands on those papers. They contain my father's vindication; they tell the world that my mother is the widow of an honest man, and that I am not a felon's offspring. That is the battle I've been fighting. I don't know why Mark Murchison did not destroy the documents, but he did not, and they fell into the clutches of Holdfast & Co., who robbed his house in Jersey."

"And now," asked the detective, "what were you looking for on the floor when I came in?"

"A clew."

"A clew to what?"

"To Nottingham's death."

"What, don't you know that he died from heart failure?"

There was a twinkle in Captain Catchem's eyes which did not escape the boy detective.

"Look at the carpet!" exclaimed Jed, pointing to the rents and abrasions he had discovered.

The New York detective got down and examined the places.

"I found the curtains drawn, so I lit the gas," remarked the boy.

"We'll let some daylight into the room." And the captain did so.

The rents which Jed had found were now plainly seen.

They indicated a struggle between two well-matched men; in the boy's eyes they could mean nothing else.

"Those rents talk, don't they?" exclaimed Captain Catchem, rising and confronting Jed.

"They beat the doctor's opinion. I have seen Nottingham at the undertaker's shop. I have had the body examined by a competent surgeon. He was throttled by human hands. No doubt he died on the bed yonder. Yes, boy, Nottingham was murdered, and I'm going to find out who did the deed. And, let me add, from this time on you have a friend in the person of Burt Butler, detective."

Jed felt like cheering.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLAYING IT FINE.

THE detective's visit to Mark Murchison at the latter's house, as mentioned, followed closely upon his meeting with Jed in Nottingham's room.

Captain Catchem showed no traces of excitement. Whatever his feelings were he never allowed them to get the upper hand and betray him, and when he informed Murchison that Nottingham was choked to death he spoke coolly and with deliberation.

As we have seen, the nabob changed color at

this announcement. He got white, and falling back in his chair like a man terribly startled, stared at the detective.

"Murdered, did you say, captain?" he exclaimed. "In heaven's name, what does this mean?"

"We'll try and find out," was the response.

"Do you think it has a bearing on—on our business?"

"I rather think it has."

"Not to our detriment, I trust. Perhaps the wolves quarreled."

"The two men, you mean?"

"Holdfast & Co. Rascals fall out among themselves sometimes, you know."

"Quite often."

By this time Mark Murchison had recovered much of his composure, for he laughed and lit a cigar.

Captain Catchem seemed to be making a study of him through the fleecy smoke which he sent ceilingward in white puffs.

"The boy seems to have left the trail," he suddenly remarked.

Murchison did not disclose what he knew. He did not think it worth his while to tell his detective how he had interviewed the young shadow in that very room, and how the boy had refused to yield a point.

"We'll get along without him, eh, captain?" he queried.

"I hope so; but, by the way, there's something I'd like to know about the young lynx."

"What about him?"

"Who was his father?"

Murchison seemed to think a moment before answering.

"He was a man who might have been better thought of than he was."

"You knew him, then?"

"Yes. I'm sorry to say that we were cousins."

"You and that boy's father?"

"Yes. The story is well known in another part of the country, and it isn't to John Jeffreys's credit, either."

"Did he get into trouble?"

"No, he surrounded himself with it. His prison life, though, taught him a lesson, and he was a pretty square man after that."

"What was the nature of his crime?"

"He forged a lot of notes—a foolish bit of business, for he was suspected from the first. It was a plain case. John Jeffreys showed no discretion. He claimed to be persecuted; he even said that I was at the bottom of the whole affair, because I happened to profit by his foolish crime."

"You, Mr. Murchison?"

"Yes. It was this way: Abel Murchison, a relative of ours, was a bachelor and very wealthy. He intended to leave John Jeffreys and I snug fortunes. John couldn't wait; he wanted money. The old man was living too long to suit him, and so he forged papers which got him into trouble. When he was sentenced to prison Abel Murchison made a new will, and I became his sole legatee. That's how I got my start."

"Did John Jeffreys ever confess?"

"He never confessed."

"What did he do when he came out of prison?"

"He started in to live it down, but it was uphill work."

"I suppose he never liked you on account of your good luck."

"The whole family hated me," smiled Murchison. "Mrs. Jeffreys instilled hate into their boy—the pair had but one child, Jed—and that's why he refused to describe the men who plundered my house, robbing me of much wealth and some valuable papers. I might have bought them off, but I would not do that. Sarah Jeffreys and her son pretended to believe that I had given John a paper clearing him of the crime for which he had served a term; but nobody took any stock in that. It was a hobby of theirs then, and I doubt not they would tell the same story now."

"Perhaps," answered the detective.

"The family never liked me," continued Murchison. "I don't know why, unless they thought I was a little too close to Abel, the Jersey Croesus. When John Jeffreys was dying, 'tis said he called upon heaven to blight my prospects in life, but I enjoy pretty good health to-day, and, barring the robbery and its attending annoyances, I've had the best of luck."

"Now, if we can catch the young man, you'll have better luck still," said Captain Catchem.

This brought Murchison back to the present.

"You must despoil him!" he exclaimed, leaning suddenly across the table. "Holdfast & Co. has lost its senior member. The papers

are in the young man's possession. As I have remarked before, they may have had an altercation. You say Nottingham, alias Nathan, was murdered! Who knows but the hand of Webb Weldon is somewhere in the shadow of this crime?"

"Stranger events than this have taken place in my experience."

"I don't doubt it. I want the game to close, captain. You have but one man to watch now. He will change his quarters, especially if he had a hand in Nottingham's sudden taking off. Work rapidly from now on. I want the papers. If you could place them on my table during the next forty-eight hours, I would be pleased to place ten thousand dollars in your bank to your credit."

There was an eagerness in Murchison's voice which easily caught Captain Catchem's ear.

"I'll do that," was the deliberate answer.

"You will? Within forty-eight hours?"

"Yes."

A gleam of intense pleasure animated Murchison's eyes.

"I depend on you!" he cried. "Within forty-eight hours I am to have my property. Don't fail me, Captain Catchem."

"I fail nobody."

Ten minutes later the New York detective was on the street again and the nabob of the avenue was alone.

The detective was not the only person on the trail.

Jersey Jed was also at work, a young foxhound on the trail of one whom he was very anxious to run down.

He made another visit to Mrs. Pope only to discover that Webb Weldon had not been back.

Mrs. Pope still believed that heart disease had struck down her lodger and the boy ferret did not see fit to disabuse her mind on this subject.

He left the house and was many squares away when—it was early lamp-lighting now—he saw a woman stop to admire for a while a brilliant display of goods in a large window.

There was something about the figure that thrilled while it attracted Jed.

A minute later the woman turned to go and he saw her face.

"I thought so!" he inwardly exclaimed.

"Now, Polly, I will devote my time to you. If you are a spy in Lola's home you know where your master is. And he's the gentleman I'm looking for."

And Jersey Jed, with secret rejoicing over his unexpected bit of good luck, from that moment kept Lola Lewis's maid in sight, believing that she would lead him to something better.

CHAPTER XVII. POLLY IN A SNARE.

JED had not been long on the trail ere he discovered that Polly Pindar was possessed of more shrewdness than he gave her credit for.

The girl ever and anon looked cautiously back as though suspicious, stopped now and then to inspect the handsome displays to be seen in the store windows, but in reality to see whether she was followed or no.

The Jersey boy soon found that he had an opponent who demanded his entire keenness, but he managed to elude Polly's watchful eyes, and to track her at last into a street where he was certain Webb Weldon had located.

Polly at last with a final look in every direction ran up several front steps, gave a door-knob a quick turn, and vanished.

"Caged at last!" murmured Jed, hastening forward. "I thought she was going to run me all over the city and then give me my trouble for my pains. She's led me to Weldon's retreat; I have no doubt of this. Now, if I could look beyond that door I'm sure I would be able to pick up something important."

For once, at least, the young shadow from the country would have been disappointed, for Polly found no one at home, though this did not seem to give her much trouble.

When she had ascended to a room on the second floor, she quietly removed her hat and composed herself to wait for somebody's return.

Was this somebody Weldon?

She had passed an hour in the room when footsteps came up the stairs and stopped at the door. Polly looked anxious and breathless toward the portal.

In a moment the door was opened and the girl sprang to her feet.

A strange man stood before her.

"Don't run! I don't devour people," said this person, coming forward with a smile, but taking good care to keep between Polly and the door.

Polly fell back.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed.

"Whom do you think?"

She could not reply. The reply she felt she ought to make and tell the truth seemed to paralyze her tongue.

Webb Weldon had told her to look out for a man whose description fitted the one now before her.

He was a detective. He called him Captain Catchem, and said that he was on the trail for Mark Murchison, her old employer.

The man in the room seemed to enjoy Polly's fears, which was his manner of playing with her as a cat plays with the entrapped mouse.

"Polly, let us go back a few years in your history," he suddenly said. "How many windows have you left unfastened since the night of June 10th, 1880?"

It is no wonder that she almost fell from the chair which she had taken. She felt the blood quit her cheeks; she trembled, looked at the man, and no longer doubted his identity.

"Do you not call to mind that little incident?" continued the detective. "The failure to have a certain window fastened on that particular night cost some one dearly."

Polly felt that she must speak.

"You are very bold in your charges," she cried. "You accuse me of an act which implies a crime."

"Do I indeed?" laughed the other. "Is it criminal to forget to fasten a window? I believe your story was that you forgot."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Polly.

The penetrating eyes of the man were upon her.

"Come, I will freshen your memory, Polly, though, to tell the truth, I believe it is so good as to need no freshening. In the summer of the year I have mentioned you were housemaid to one Mark Murchison who owned a fine estate in New Jersey. On the night in question the house was entered by masked men and robbed. There were two of them, and they entered by a back window which, as you afterward said, you forgot to fasten. Nobody questioned your honesty then. You had the entire confidence of Mark Murchison, and I doubt if he has since blamed you for a moment."

"Some time after the robbery you left his employ, disappeared suddenly, and never went back. To-day you are maid to an estimable young woman who—"

"Stop right there!" interrupted Polly throwing up her hand. "I'm nobody's maid. I'm free again."

"Discharged eh, Polly?"

"I'm free, I say."

"Free, but still Webb Weldon's spy!"

In an instant the girl was upon her feet.

"Still Webb Weldon's spy," coolly repeated the man before her.

Polly said nothing; again she felt that if she attempted to speak, her voice would fail her, her tongue stand still.

"This man has had you in his employ for six years," the detective went on. "You left the window we've been talking about unfastened because he commanded it. You betrayed your master and afterward lived off the proceeds of that night's crime. Now you serve Webb Weldon again. You are spy upon the beautiful young girl whom he hopes to win by an infamous trick. Polly, if you have not guessed my identity, let me call myself Burt Butler, detective."

Polly had passed the stage of being frightened by an announcement of this kind.

"Well, what do you want with me?" she asked.

"What do you think, Polly?"

"Am I to be taken?"

"You will go with me, but, unless you exhibit some stubbornness, you will not be locked up."

"How long were you with him?" queried the detective.

"Three years, all told."

"Do you know when John Jeffreys came back from prison?"

"I recollect it very well."

"Did he come to Mark Murchison's house one night?"

"He did."

"And the two were closeted together, eh?"

"Yes."

"What did you hear, Polly?"

"I do you think—"

"I know you listened! John Jeffreys afterward told his family that he saw a figure crouched in the hall when he came out of the library. What were those men talking about?"

"John Jeffreys made Mark Murchison sign certain papers."

"Ah."

"He said he would kill him if he did not. Those papers referred to the crime for which Jeffreys had spent some years in prison."

"Did they declare him innocent?"

"I think they did."

"On the oath of Mark Murchison, eh?"

"Yes. They were never to be made public until after Jeffreys's death. He said he could stand the accusation which had blighted his career, but that he wanted to have sworn proofs of his innocence as a legacy to his family."

"Did he?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Some months later he lost those papers. They were stolen from their hiding-place."

"Who took them, Polly?"

"I don't know."

"But, who profited by the theft?"

"Mark Murchison."

"Do you say that the papers which he signed, and which declared John Jeffreys, his cousin, innocent of the crime for which he had been convicted, fell back into his hands?"

"I do say it," answered Polly solemnly.

"Well, what afterward became of them?"

There was no reply.

"Did he destroy them as ninety-nine men in a hundred would have done?"

"It seems not."

"I thought so. Polly, those papers fell into the hands of the men for whom you forgot to fasten the window!"

A faint smile appeared at the corners of Polly's pretty mouth.

"Don't you think you've served Holdfast & Co. about long enough?" inquired the old detective, noticing the smile.

"You want me to play traitress again, don't you?"

"In the interest of justice, though," was the quick response.

"And you Mark Murchison's detective?" cried Polly.

Captain Catchem did not seem to notice the girl's last remark.

"Webb Weldon is custodian of the papers, is he not?" he asked.

"I haven't seen them in his possession," was the evasive reply.

"Come, give me square answers," said the detective, sternly. "He has the stolen papers?"

"Holdfast & Co. had them."

"But Nottingham is dead. He didn't give them up. They were not in the room nor on his person when his life went out. Were you waiting here for Weldon?"

"I have not said that he lives here."

Captain Catchem could not keep back a laugh.

"Let me put an end to all this, Polly," said he. "I have a sister living in another part of the city. I want you to meet her, and to make your home with her, not for long, but until I have made a move or two."

"You will then lock me up, I suppose?"

"That depends on your behavior. You are from this hour under my eye. I know your past. Try to save Webb Weldon by warning him, or serve the scamp another hour, and I will send you up the river without mercy!"

A sound of doom was in the words as the detective spoke them.

"If you want justice done," said Polly, with an effort, "I don't see how you can serve Mark Murchison. He sent John Jeffreys to prison and then had stolen from his family the proofs of Jeffreys's innocence. But I must not forget that you detectives work for money. As I had to tell you what I knew, I wish to Heaven we had had a listener!"

"What do you mean?"

"I wish the boy—the young shadow—could have heard us. He and his mother, not Mark Murchison, are the ones who should profit by my story."

"Never mind Jed Jeffreys," rejoined Captain Catchem. "I want to tell you, Polly, that I'm not quite as black as you make me," and when the shadow rose to conduct her from the room, the look he got was a puzzle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE.

If Polly had found Webb Weldon at home instead of having to wait in his quarters for the man who really came—Captain Catchem, the detective—the chapter just read would not have been written.

The girl had encountered the wrong man and he had drawn from her some important facts deeply connected with his hunt.

Let us see.

While Polly was telling her story under protest, Mr. Webb Weldon, the last of the house of Holdfast & Co., was carefully writing a letter in a small room whose only furniture consisted of a round table and a chair.

If the reader could have stolen into the room and looked over the young man's shoulder he would have seen the ink glistening on a page which bore the following sentences:

"To the Chief of Police:—

"I desire to inform you that there lives in this city, and in elegant leisure, at that, a man who six years ago and in the State of Jersey, committed one of the most infamous crimes on record. This was, the several forgeries of the name of a wealthy gentleman, now dead, the crime being perpetrated for a two-fold purpose—to enrich the perpetrator and to destroy the reputation of his cousin. The crime was successful. It made its originator the sole heir of the man whose name he forged, and sent his cousin to prison. I have direct proofs of the man's guilt. They are in his own handwriting—a confession which he was forced to write out by the one he had wronged. He afterward had those papers stolen for his own purposes, only to lose them in turn before he could destroy them.

"Now, I say that I can lay my hand on these papers at any time. Do you want them? Will you promptly use them if they are turned over to you? I want to see the guilty punished and justice done the innocent. It cannot help the man who went to prison for another's crime; but his family rests under the disgrace while the real villain rolls in wealth. If you will take the papers and use them without fear or favor, say so in the next *Heralt*.

"Yours for justice.
"Right."

Webb Weldon read his work over with a good deal of satisfaction, and took his departure.

Before quitting the room he had inclosed his letter in a large envelope, which he had addressed to the chief of police of New York, writing "Private and important" in one corner.

He made his way to Mulberry street, entered the building occupied by the Police Department, and leaving his letter with an official whom he found on duty there, vanished like a mist.

About an hour after these events a man, who was none other than our old friend, Captain Catchem, sat in the private office of the handsome and shrewd superintendent of police for the city.

A letter which the detective had just read lay on the table before the pair, and there was a meaningful twinkle in the captain's eye.

"This move don't astonish me," said Butler, glancing at the letter. "All around, this is the most interesting case I've had dealings with for years. The man who wrote that letter holds just what he says he does. He is going to make his last play—may have made it by this time. If he fails he will treat with you; if he wins, you won't hear from him any more."

"Will he win or fail?" asked the superintendent, anxiously.

"The end for him is failure," replied Captain Catchem, in emphatic voice. "He can't bleed his victim, though he would give half his fortune to have those documents safe in his hands. The writer of the letter is playing for two fortunes and a wife."

"Big stakes!" laughed the chief.

"Rather," grinned Captain Catchem.

"And you say he shall not win?"

"I do."

"Ought I to answer that letter, as he suggests?"

"By all means do."

The superintendent pushed a piece of paper toward the detective, who took up a pen and wrote thus:

"Right":—Am ready to see you at your own time, and either at home or abroad.

"Justice."

"That will do," said the superintendent, when he had read the reply, and five minutes afterward the detective stood under the lamps of New York, with a quizzical smile on his face.

"I'll see if the last move but one has been made," he exclaimed, starting off.

The hour had not yet grown late when Mark Murchison's door-bell tinkled violently, and the servant, with a face quite white, stared at the person who presented himself on the step.

"Have you seen him?" she inquired. "Oh, I'm afraid something dreadful has happened. He never acted so before, though he's been troubled for some time."

The girl spoke without catching breath until the end of her last sentence.

By this time the caller was in the hall, and the door had been shut.

"Where is your master?" he asked.

"Gone! Gone! He had a caller a few minutes ago."

"What was he like? You saw him, of course."

"I let him in."

"Well?"

"He was youngish-looking, from what I could see. He went straight to the library without sending in his card, and the moment he opened the door I heard my master say, 'My God!' and then there was dead silence."

"How long did the man stay?"

"Not longer than ten minutes."

"Did the man go away alone?"

"He did."

"Followed to the door by Mr. Murchison?"

"No. He went out unescorted."

"Your master remaining in the library, eh?"

"Yes. But, who are you? Ah, I see now! You have been here before. You are serving him in some manner."

"I am. You must tell me all you know."

"Come into the library, then."

Captain Catchem—the man was the detective—followed the girl into the designated room and seated himself.

"I know he went away in a terrible frame of mind," resumed the maid. "I could hear him moving in this room, opening and shutting drawers, ransacking the safe yonder, and now and then breaking out into awful imprecations. He acted like a madman. I believe you are a detective. If so you may find him. The man who called is to be blamed for the whole thing."

"You are right," said the detective, smiling to himself; but he went no further.

He had no doubt that Webb Weldon had visited Mark Murchison. He had boldly invaded the same house in which he had met with a repulse at the muzzle of a revolver.

Had his last visit proved successful? Had he delivered over to Murchison the papers for which Jed Jeffreys had struggled nearly all his life?

It must be admitted that the detective went from the nabob's house considerably puzzled.

It began to look to him as if something had slipped through his fingers.

He went straight to the boy detective's home, and the moment Mrs. Jeffreys saw him she lost color and drew back.

"Think of me as you will," said Captain Catchem, "I'm willing that you shall judge me by my acts. Where's Jed?"

"Out, sir."

"Do you expect him in soon?"

"There's no telling."

"Is he 'at work'?"

"He is always busy. I think if you were not standing between him and justice he could end the play satisfactorily to us all."

"Madam, you don't know what you say when you accuse Burt Butler of blocking the wheels of justice."

"I know that you are in Mark Murchison's employ! You know that he has wronged us; you know that those papers should be in our hands. Captain Catchem—I call you by the name you have won by your shrewdness—if you keep us from vindicating my dead husband's character, I shall call down upon your head the—"

"Stop right there, madame!" broke in the detective. "I shall see that nothing of this kind happens."

Sarah Jeffreys looked strangely into Captain Catchem's face and wondered how he—Mark Murchison's ferret—could talk thus.

"I've found Polly," he suddenly continued.

"Polly Pindar? Ah! I've not forgotten her. She was Murchison's maid and would be a valuable witness for us if she could be induced to talk."

"Polly has talked."

"For you, Captain Catchem, but not for us. Has she betrayed the secret she has kept so long?"

"What secret?"

"The secret of her connection with Holdfast & Co. Jed and I now know that she was the friend of the firm when Murchison was robbed, and she is now playing spy for Webb Weldon in the house of Lola Lewis, who is, with her fortune, the prize of his game. She wouldn't talk for us, but if you have unsealed her tongue you and your master have scored a point."

Captain Catchem did not speak for a moment.

"Polly Pindar didn't like to talk," said he.

"But you forced her, did you?" smiled the widow.

"I may have used a little stratagem. Madame, do you know that Holdfast & Co. stand dissolved?"

"Dissolved by death!" exclaimed Jed's mother. "Nottingham or Nathan, it matters not which, went out of the world in a hurry, and you know how he died."

Mrs. Jeffreys's eyes were fastened upon the city shadow.

"Webb Weldon didn't kill his companion," she went on. "He didn't kill himself. My boy didn't commit the crime. Now, who did?"

There was no reply.

"Wasn't that man content with one crime on his soul?" the widow went on. "Did he have to creep upon Nottingham and throttle him on the bed? Captain Catchem, you ought to be careful whom you serve!"

Before the detective could speak, even if he had so intended, the door was burst open and Jed stood in the middle of the room holding above his head a packet while his eyes shone as they had never shone before.

"At last, mother! at last!" cried the boy.

CHAPTER XIX.

WEBB WELDON'S TARTAR.

MRS. JEFFREYS starting up, stood as one petrified between Jed and the table, and Captain Catchem's eyes had a stare of wonder.

Had the Boy Hustler succeeded where he had failed? "You haven't got the papers?" he cried.

"Haven't I?" answered the Jersey boy shaking the package in triumph. "If I haven't found them, I'd like to know what I hold in my hand!"

"Thank God!" cried the widow. "After long years of waiting I see the proofs of my husband's innocence! Oh, Jed! Jed!" And she caught her boy in her arms and kissed him until something glittered on the detective's cheek.

When Jed could escape from his mother's embrace he went to the table and placed thereon the packet he had brought home.

"You shall see for yourself, Captain Catchem," said he. "There shall be no secrets between us. Come and see!"

A few seconds later the detective was reading a paper which, a day or two before, would have been a great revelation, but which just then was not so much of one.

"It is all clear," said Captain Catchem when he looked up and encountered the joyful and victorious look of mother and son. "But, how did you get possession of these papers, Jed?"

"I had a tussle for them," the boy answered with a smile. "I thought it was now or never, and, indeed, they were in the greatest danger," and seating himself in front of the table he began to tell the story of his capture.

We will follow the boy ferret through the whole adventure, but will tell it as it best suits us, going back in our story far enough to begin at the beginning.

When Weldon came out of Mark Murchison's house which he visited soon after leaving the letter at Police Headquarters for the superintendent, he was seen by a boy who had been "on guard" for some time.

The young man had had a single adventure in the nabob's house to which he had gone to play his last desperate card against his victim.

As the maid had told Captain Catchem, Murchison was surprised to see his tormentor once more beneath his roof. His eye was at once lowered to the drawer in the table, but Weldon, knowing what was there, stepped across the carpet and said in low but meaningful tones:

"If you dare, sir! I have fixed things outside. If I am killed here, you will be exposed to-morrow—not for one crime, but two!"

Murchison recoiled with a gasp. Weldon's words seemed to have taken his breath.

"You made nothing by the quick play you executed in this room," continued the young man. "You got a few blank pages for your pains. Now, sir, deal fair with me and the whole matter ends here. Put me off another hour and we will see what happens. The dead talk sometimes. The eye of justice is never closed, and rents in the carpet tell as much as the doctors!"

The last words drove from Murchison's cheek all the color which had come back, and his hand shook on the edge of the table.

"I want two hundred and fifty thousand dollars," continued Weldon.

Another gasp.

"You have raised," said the nabob.

"Yes, I know a good deal now," was the response. "You must not trifle with me. The day for trifling has passed. What do you say?"

Murchison thought fast.

He would give thousands if he could but see Captain Catchem before paying this cool rascal a dollar.

If he could gain a little time—if he could put off the settlement until to-morrow—he would accomplish his purpose.

"I am ready to compromise, but not quite ready to pay," said he. "I want the papers delivered in the presence of a third party."

Weldon started.

"Have you a secret-sharer?" he queried.

"Never mind that. A third party must be present."

"Call him in."

"I cannot just now."

"When can he come?"

"By eight o'clock to-morrow."

"And you will pay then?"

"Yes."

"On your oath?"

"On my oath!"

Mark Murchison answered promptly. He was ready for anything by which he could gain the desired time.

"Very well," said Weldon, "at eight o'clock to-morrow I will be here. Have your witness ready, but remember that I will come prepared. I am armed as I've never been armed before, and I can make those papers utterly valueless to you."

The young man looked Murchison squarely in the face while he talked, and it was not until he had said "good-night" and passed from the house that the nabob moved or spoke.

"He knows too much," he cried. "I'm deeper in his clutches than I ever was. In heaven's name, how did he make the discovery? I must see Catchem. He shall play swift and fast for me!"

But before he quitted the house he ransacked some drawers and his safe. He took from the latter certain papers which he destroyed in the flame of his table-jet, acting all the time like a man pursued by a Nemesis.

When he had done this he left the house, and the maid coming down to the library, saw abundant evidences of his work.

Meantime, as we have seen, Webb Weldon had been followed by a figure from the very steps of Mark Murchison's house.

He went home—that is, to the little room in which, while waiting for him, Polly had fallen into the hands of the detective.

Jersey Jed, who had followed her to the house, had left her to go to Murchison's domicile in hopes of finding Webb Weldon, and with the result just noticed.

He had now tracked the young man home, and believing that the papers were still in his possession, he resolved to get them by a coup, to put off which any longer looked dangerous.

Knowing that Weldon would not surrender the documents without a struggle, Jed made up his mind that a battle would have to be fought for them, and to this end he took risks and made his way to a sloping roof that lay directly beneath the young man's bedroom.

This window had no shutters, but the curtain was pulled down in a manner which threatened to prevent the boy from seeing the interior of the room. He was not baffled, however, for a thin strip of light enabled him to see Weldon seated at a table, from which he rose at last to prepare for bed.

But alas! for Jed's well-formed plans.

His watch-hole was so circumscribed that he could not see Weldon all the time, and when he passed beyond either side of the window, he was momentarily lost.

During one of these intervals the curtain was suddenly jerked aside, and a pane of glass flew to pieces in Jed's face.

The boy detective fell back with a sharp cry of horror which had hardly ceased to sound when the window went up and a hand closed on his collar.

The next moment he was dragged over the sill and into the room, Webb Weldon laughing triumphantly at the time, and when Jed recovered he found himself in an arm-chair with the last member of Holdfast & Co. gazing down upon him.

"Still on the alert?" exclaimed Weldon.

"I'm always there," was the quick answer.

"Don't you know that you can't win without my help?"

"It looks that way," acquiesced Jed, a sudden thought entering his mind.

"You admit it at last, do you?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

Weldon made no answer for a minute, during which time he continued to watch the boy he had caught.

"I want to show you something," he went on. "You know me and what I have. I need not conceal the truth. I want money, boy; I want a large sum and the way the world wags now-

adays we get money by our wits. These millionaires add to their store by fleecing one another and nobody objects. I'm no nabob; therefore, if I play hawk against one of the gold-bugs and strip him of a few feathers which he never came by honestly, what's the difference? But, look here! I have something that'll delight your eyes."

As he finished, Weldon took from his bosom a few papers, at sight of which the boy detective nearly jumped from his chair.

"They make your eyes sparkle, do they?" cried Weldon. "They've been in good hands ever since that eventful night in Jersey. You recollect it? To be sure you do. Look! they're all here, five in all!" and Weldon fingered the ends of the papers in a manner which enabled Jed to count them.

"Don't you intend some day to give them up and let them vindicate the family name?" the boy queried.

"I want money, I say. What will you give for the documents?" and Weldon held the papers toward Jed.

"You know we're worth nothing," replied the boy, insulted by the villain's words.

"Can't make so much as one offer?" sneered Weldon. "What did you intend doing from the roof? Was I to be robbed while I slept?"

Jed said nothing.

"These papers will make my fortune," continued Weldon. "A man always looks out for 'number one.' That's been my motto through life. I'm sorry, boy, for I'd rather sell to you. I'll come down fifty thousand. Think of the drop. Write out a check and the property is yours."

"It belongs to us as it is!"

"To you, when I've held it for six years?" grinned the young man.

"Yes, and I will have our own!"

Jed Jeffreys sprang from the chair as though shot out of it by a spring in the bottom. Three feet did not separate him from Weldon and the papers.

He went straight at the schemer with all the strength at his command; he fell upon Weldon, pushed him back against the wall, tore the papers from his grasp, and jerking loose, bounded to the door and fled.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WIND UP.

MR. WEBB WELDON was not long in realizing that, by capturing the boy sharp he had obtained possession of a tartar.

He knew this the moment he felt the precious documents wrenched from his grasp, and when he rushed after Jed it was too late.

The Jersey boy had escaped with the long-wrestled for prize in his hands!

"The jig's up now!" disconsolately growled Weldon. "This knocks me out everywhere, and especially on the avenue. Polly flched the lost letter to no purpose, and Lola's father won't listen to me now. I never saw such a collapse in all my life. I would have won if the boy had not matched me. To-morrow Mark Murchison would have come to time; but I haven't a single weapon in my hand now. Not one? Hold! He gasped, when I hinted at the other thing. I am not wrong in my surmises. Nottingham didn't die with heart disease. He was murdered, and the man who did the deed wanted—what? The very papers the boy took!"

Weldon brightened up as thoughts of this nature flitted through his mind.

"It's worth trying," said he. "Mark Murchison must pay well to keep my mouth sealed. I know who killed Nottingham!"

Weldon would have carried his new plans into effect—indeed he was on his way to Murchison's house, late as the hour was, for that very purpose—when a hand touched his arm and the next moment he was walking alongside of Captain Catchem, who had caught him on the street.

"Don't give me trouble, Mr. Weldon," said the detective quietly. "The game is up and you've lost a bride and a fortune."

Weldon looked his deep chagrin, but made no reply.

"We're going to the station, but they won't hang you for it," continued the ferret smiling as he spoke.

"For what?"

"For the old Jersey burglary; they never hang for such exploits; but, there's Nottingham, of Holdfast & Co."

"Killed! You know it, Captain Catchem!" broke in the young man.

"I know it," answered the detective with decision.

"That was Mark Murchison's work. H

couldn't wait. He wanted the papers without paying for them, and so he went to the house, found Nottingham there, or was surprised by him, no matter which, and they had a fatal tussle. That's your idea, eh, captain?"

The detective nodded.

That night Webb Weldon reflected in a cell in a police-station.

Captain Catchem had spoken truly when he said that the game was up. The grated door, and the darkness and silence of his narrow chamber confirmed this.

Captain Catchem feeling sure of his man, waited until the following morning before ringing Murchison's bell.

"I'm glad you've come!" exclaimed the maid the moment she saw him. "He came in after midnight, went to the library and is there yet. I've been afraid to enter, as though something terrible has happened—everything being so still in there."

The detective pushed forward, opened the door leading into the library, and stopped on the threshold.

At a glance he saw the form of Murchison in his chair at the table, upon which he leaned with his face buried between his arms.

A few strides carried the detective to his side. He bent over and lifted the nabob's head.

One look was all he wanted.

The end had come for Mark Murchison.

He was dead!

But, this was not all.

On the table, held down by a paper weight of solid silver, was a document which made clear the mystery of Nottingham's death; but as we do not wish to darken the conclusion of our romance with the narrative, we leave the reader to guess the truth.

Besides being a confession, the paper was a will, as well, and the Jeffreys at last received justice at the hands of the man who had so deeply wronged them.

The documents which the boy detective recovered from Webb Weldon established his father's innocence and removed from his family the foul stigma under which it had suffered so long.

It seems that, while looking for Captain Catchem, Murchison discovered that Weldon had been arrested, and believing that the papers, which he should have destroyed, would condemn him, he went home and—died!

Webb Weldon was tried for the old burglary, after all. Polly's confession fixed the crime on him, and he received "Jersey justice" at last.

Lola Lewis, whose honor Jed had saved by balking Weldon, became the happy bride of the young man whom she loved when her father was caught by Webb's artful story, and Lewis never regretted his daughter's choice.

But the happiest of all were the Jeffreys.

"I thought all the time that Murchison was trying to cover up some piece of rascality," said Captain Catchem to Jed and his mother, "and I made up my mind to serve Justice while I worked for him. It's all right now, boy; and if you've no objections we'll open an office in new quarters and hang out a sign reading 'Butler & Jeffreys, Detectives.'"

Jed laughed heartily at the famous detective's conceit, but the dream became a reality before many months had passed, and "Butler & Jeffreys" greets the eyes of many who know not the secret of the partnership.

As to Polly, she was released, and disappeared the same day, going no one knows whither.

Scissors Simon still cuts profiles with his nimble shears, and Jed frequently visits him for a jolly hour.

I tell you, boys, Grit and Perseverance win, all the time, especially when Honor pilots the way.

THE END.

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